

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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The Milk-Run Murder
NEW
MIKE SHAYNE
THRILLER
By **BRETT HALLIDAY**

SYD HOFF
DENNIS LYNDS
JONATHAN CRAIG
MORRIS HERSHMAN
ED DAVIS



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BRETT HALLIDAY

Three Shaynes In Three Issues

IN AN AGE OF popularity ratings, chart-tested and revised from week to week, an editor is in a far less enviable position than a research scientist. For the latter knows, as a rule, exactly where he stands both immediately before and immediately after he conducts an unusual experiment. An editor has to wait for letters to come in and the response of readers in general to be appraised in other ways.

Fortunately letters are seldom long in arriving, and in less than a week after the first installment of the new Mike Shayne serial—THE BODY THAT CAME BACK—appeared on the stands we received a number of them, the majority expressing enthusiastic approval and a good many because we were also going to publish two complete Mike Shayne thrillers within the three issue span of the serial.

We felt that the immense popularity of the redhead, both in his book-length and novelet appearances, would more than justify our running two Mike Shayne stories during the course of the serial, in the issues containing the second and third installments.

Misconceptions arise occasionally whenever a new policy is undertaken and we wish to stress again that, in only one instance, in the issue containing the opening installment, did we depart from our usual custom of running a complete new Mike Shayne adventure.

And now that the serial has been concluded we will have brought you, in the short space of three months—actually only two months in elapsed time—three Shayne stories—two of novelet-length and the third a complete, book-length novel.

A unique tribute to a unique private eye.

Leo Margulies
Publisher

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1964

Vol. 14, No. 3

NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET THE MILK-RUN MURDER

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne was air-borne and looking forward to a relaxing vacation in the tropics. Why did one of the passengers have to be a killer?

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LEO MARGULIES

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THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE THRILLER



THE MILK-RUN MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The plane was headed for Central America and Shayne was feeling vacation-minded. He certainly needed a rest. In fact, there was only one thing he didn't need . . . a murder to unravel.



LATER, MIKE SHAYNE was to remember that the small man had passed him once. Some hours after the old DC-3 had left Miami, the man had walked down the aisle toward the toilets and cargo compartment to the rear of the passenger cabin. And Shayne remembered that he had, indeed, seemed a little nervous.

But at the time all Shayne saw was a nondescript small individual with a Van Dyke beard who wore a light grey tropical suit, and who carried a grey leather attache

case. As far as Shayne could recall later, it was the only time he had seen the small man on the aircraft. The detective, like the other passengers, could remember having seen him earlier in the Miami waiting room.

It was the first time in many years that Shayne had flown to Central America, and the big red-headed Miami detective was determined to make the most of his 'vacation.' As soon as the old prop-job left Miami, Shayne had relaxed in his window seat, poured

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a good four fingers of cognac from the small bottle he had equipped himself with, and warmed the silver glass of amber fluid in his big paw.

For a long time there was nothing below but the blue water of the Gulf of Mexico. The old DC-3 flew smoothly above the shining water, the passengers chatted amiably among themselves, and the single blue-uniformed hostess stopped to say a few pleasant words to everyone. It was a vacation atmosphere, and while Shayne was flying south on a job, it was of a routine nature—a matter of carrying some important papers to Guatemala City—and he expected no trouble.

Shayne was wrong.

He had just finished his third glass of cognac, and his grey eyes were studying the slim and very pretty hostess with appreciation as she walked down the aisle toward the rear, when he became aware that the plane was rapidly nearing its destination. The hostess was tall, well-curved, and definitely good to look at. But Shayne became more interested for the moment in the approaching coastline of British Honduras far below.

He turned his gaze away from the hostess, and studied the green and swampy coastline. It was a jumble of tiny villages and steaming jungle. Far off to the left Shayne saw the old city of Belize shining in

the afternoon sunlight. Ahead there were mist-wreathed blue mountains, and beyond them the central plain and jungle of Guatemala.

It was at that instant that the hostess screamed.

"Sir! You can't be in there! Look out! Oh . . . Oh . . . my God! He's going!"

The last frantic "Oh!" ended in a high, shrill, horrified scream.

For an instant there was no sound in the DC-3 but the faint roar of the engines and the fading echo of the scream. No one moved. In their seats the passengers seemed paralyzed.

Then Shayne was running down the aisle toward the open door of the cargo section. The hostess stood in the doorway, her hands tight over her eyes, the knuckles of her fingers white with tension.

Shayne pushed the hostess into the nearest empty seat, and looked into the cargo compartment. His trained eyes took in the scene at a glance.

The door of the cargo section was gone! It had been literally blown out, and the wind of flight rushed through the yawning opening and scoured the cargo area. A small piece of torn grey cloth clung to the edge of the open doorway, and on the deck near the door was a small grey-leather attache case.

The force of the wind was

swiftly pulling some small wooden crates toward the yawning aperture, causing them to spin crazily.

Behind Shayne the hostess was babbling now in semi-hysteria.

"He shouldn't have been in there. I called, you see, but the plane lurched. He—he fell against the door and he dropped his case. The door just came open, just blew out. I don't understand it. Oh, it was horrible. The look on his face! He tried to save himself. He dropped the case, you see, but it was too late!"

"Who was he?" Shayne asked, turning and grasping her gently but firmly by the arm. "Just remember—there's nothing you can do now. It was a tragic accident."

The hostess seemed to be trying to focus her mind and her eyes. She blinked at Shayne. By now some of the other passengers had come to gather around the distraught girl. Some of them were staring into the wind-scoured cargo area.

"What did you say?" the hostess murmured.

"The man who fell, who was he?" Shayne said. "You'll have to radio ahead. The pilot has to know."

The hostess said vacantly, "Has to know—" Then her blue eyes seemed to focus. "Oh, yes, of course."

She straightened, walked shakily to her own seat, and picked up her clipboard. She sat down again,



her legs so weak she almost fell into the seat, and her skirt hiked up above her shapely knees.

She pointed at the list on the clipboard. "Mr. Rudolph," the hostess said, "from Miami. A printing salesman. He was going to Guatemala City on business. Oh, I never . . . I never . . ."

"Take it easy," Shayne urged. "You couldn't have helped. If you had gone any closer the suction would have pulled you out with him."

In her seat the hostess looked up gratefully at the detective. Her neat and severe blonde hair was coming loose, one long blonde lock dropping into her eyes. She absently brushed it back. Tears had begun in her eyes, and her mascara was beginning to run. Then she seemed to notice her exposed knees, and pulled her skirt down.

"I'll tell the pilot," Shayne said.

II

MIKE SHAYNE left the hostess in the care of an older woman passenger, and walked forward to the pilot's compartment. He did not bother to knock. He opened the door and went inside. The pilot was alone. When he saw Shayne, his lips tightened and a look of anger came into his eyes.

"Passengers not allowed. Please leave—right now."

"Relax, Captain," Shayne said. "You just lost a passenger."

The plane gave a sickening lurch as the pilot's hands slipped on the controls. He managed to grasp them firmly again, but he seemed stunned. Shayne explained what had happened.

The pilot turned white under his deep tropical tan. Shayne guessed that a pilot on a small airline like this one had probably already had his share of troubles and did not relish more. An accident would not help his record.

"The cargo hatch? Impossible! That hatch was tight as a drum." He spoke the words harshly, as if in protest. "I can't understand how it could have happened."

"You've got one distraught hostess to prove it was a pretty loose drum," Shayne said. "She saw the whole thing. She's pretty well shaken up, and I don't blame her. What a way to go!"

"Shaken up?" the Captain said.

"She's resting now," Shayne

said. "Don't worry—she'll be all right."

The pilot swore. "Damn! She's not supposed to let go at all. Looking after the passengers is her job. If they panic . . . that's all I need! It's bad enough on this run without accidents, and inexperienced hostesses!"

"The passengers seem calm enough," Shayne said. "Maybe you just better report ahead?"

"Yeh," the pilot said. For a moment he stared down at the thick jungle, and misty blue mountains. Then he looked at the empty seat beside him. "My co-pilot's back there somewhere. Tell him to come up here."

"Co-pilot?" Shayne said. "I didn't see him."

"Well, damn it, find him! Sorry, I don't even know your name."

"It's Shayne," the redhead said. "Mike Shayne."

"The detective?" the pilot said in surprise. "I've read a lot about you. Well, I'd be grateful if you'd take over with the passengers, and tell Mack he's needed here. We're only about an hour out of Guatemala City. By the way, I'm Walter Jones."

"Glad to take over, Jones," Shayne said.

When Shayne walked back into the passenger section he studied the passengers casually. An accident like this could be very dangerous on a plane. Passengers whose nerves had been strained

to the breaking point could easily go into a panic, afraid that the whole aircraft would fall apart in mid-air.

But everyone seemed calm enough. Perhaps a little too calm. A man had just died in the most tragic kind of accident, and the passengers seemed almost unconcerned.

The hostess was sleeping against the shoulder of the elderly American woman who had been among the first to caution her against succumbing to panic. The hostess had her cheek against the seat cushion, and her thick pancake makeup was staining the seat. Even the collar of her neat uniform was covered with a fine sprinkling of white powder. She would probably have a fit when she woke up, Shayne told himself.

None of the passengers seemed on the edge of panic, and Shayne began to look for the co-pilot. The DC-3 offered few hiding places, but the man was nowhere in sight.

Shayne looked up and down the aisle, but all the seats were empty. He checked the rest rooms next. The co-pilot was not in either of them. Only the fatal cargo section was left.

Inside the cargo area the hatch was still wide open. The wind still whipped through the compartment, but less so now, and Shayne realized that the pilot had slowed down and gone to a lower altitude. The detective walked care-



fully away from the open hatch as he examined the cargo. Nothing seemed strange, or at variance with the kind of cargo ordinarily carried by a plane. There was nothing hidden behind the various crates. Then Shayne noticed a large crate that protruded into the aisle.

The crate had obviously been moved, for the lettering on its face clearly stated that it was to stand upright. Now it lay on its side and protruded into the aisle, impeding passage toward the rear of the cargo section.

Shayne looked around and behind the crate. Nothing. Then he looked closely at the crate itself. It had been opened, and the lid was loose. Shayne gripped the lid firmly and raised it with a sudden foreboding coming upon him and making him reluctant to look inside.

The body of a man lay in the crate.

The body was twisted grotesquely around a piece of tall oil-well equipment. It was clothed in a pilot's uniform. A small but deadly knife protruded from the dead man's chest exactly where the heart was. Shayne had found the co-pilot.

III

THE PILOT JUST stared ahead through his window. Only the man's white knuckles on the wheel showed the shock he was obviously feeling.

"Dead?" Captain Jones muttered. "Mack's dead?"

"Murdered," Shayne said. "Stabbed in the chest. I'd say about two hours ago—maybe more. I'm no expert."

"That's just dandy!" Captain Jones said, and then he murmured softly, "Poor Mack. On this rotten run, too. He was a good pilot."

"You got any ideas?" Shayne said.

The pilot's shoulders lifted in a slight shrug. "Maybe it was the dead passenger, Rudolph. Maybe he didn't fall out of that hatch."

"Did you radio the news to Guatemala City?"

"Of course," Jones said. "No answer yet. Damn that hostess. Now I need her."

"I'll try to fill in," Shayne said,

thinking ruefully that his vacation was not much of a rest so far.

"You're a lot of help, Shayne," Captain Jones said. "I mean it. We don't get the best hostesses on this run. Not the best co-pilots either."

"You think your co-pilot was possibly mixed up in something?"

"Who knows?" the man at the controls said. "I've got to get this on the air, too. Maybe you'd better not alarm the passengers."

"One of them may know a lot more than we do," Shayne said.

"Yeh," Jones agreed. "That's true enough."

Jones went to work with his radio then, and Shayne left the pilot compartment. At the head of the aisle in the main cabin he paused for the second time to study the passengers. There were only seven other passengers on the small aircraft. It was not exactly a mainline run.

The elderly American woman still sat beside the sleeping hostess. Except that the hostess was not asleep now. Even as Shayne watched, she stretched and rubbed her chin, then sat up and smiled wanly at the elderly woman.

Shayne watched the two women talking quietly to each other. The hostess rubbed her eyes, and the older woman offered the girl her compact. The hostess smiled.

The white-haired husband of the elderly American woman sat

alone close to the doorway that opened into the cargo section. The old man was calmly reading a book, and seemed unconcerned, even unaware, of what was going on around him.

A single man, whom Shayne had heard the hostess call Mr. Mellon, sat across the aisle from the white-haired man. Mr. Mellon was staring down at the dense jungle that was growing purple now in the late evening sunlight. The man smoked one cigarette after the other, and could have been purposely trying to appear nonchalant.

The most nervous passengers were a young couple who were chattering excitedly in Spanish. They were sitting as far from the cargo section as they could get. The young woman was on the verge of tears, and the young man was trying to calm her despite his own nervousness. He kept glancing back toward the cargo area.

A hard-looking blonde, and her equally hard-looking husband, were the last of the passengers. They both spoke with rough New York accents, and seemed more than nervous. They had a decidedly worried look. They seemed a lot more worried, even frightened, when the loudspeaker suddenly boomed out.

"Shayne! Come up here, quick! Shayne!"

The hard-looking blonde and her husband jumped as if shot.



They both stared at Shayne. But Shayne had more on his mind at the moment. The pilot's voice had sounded very urgent. He hurried up the aisle and went into the pilot compartment. Ahead, the lights of Guatemala City were a glow in the evening sky.

Captain Jones turned as Shayne came in. "Your Mr. Rudolph was expected in Guatemala!" he said.

"Expected?" Shayne asked, frowning.

"By the police," Captain Jones said. "Mr. Rudolph answered the description of a man suspected of stealing a fortune in uncut diamonds and killing a guard. Beard and all. Your Chief Will Gentry in Miami got onto Rudolph a few hours ago and radioed Guatemala. They didn't contact us because we were past the point of no return, and they didn't want to warn him."

"A wanted man?" Shayne said.

"Yeh," Jones said, "quite a co-

incidence that he was the one who fell out, isn't it?"

"A hell of a coincidence," Shayne said. And the big redhead began to tug on his left earlobe. "Do me a favor, Captain: I want you to send a radiogram to Miami for me, to my secretary Lucy Hamilton. I should like to know more about this Rudolph. I'll tell you how to word it."

The pilot sent the radio message, and then turned his attention to landing the DC-3 at Guatemala City.

Shayne went back to be with the passengers. He was thinking about the ill luck of the small man with the beard, and he studied the faces of the passengers even more carefully now.

IV

THE ROOM WAS small and hot. It was in a deserted section of the Guatemala City airport. The seven passengers, the hostess, Captain Jones the pilot, and Shayne sat on hard wooden chairs in the stifling heat. The late Mr. Rudolph's attache case was on the desk with its lid open. Behind the desk sat Major Miguel Estaban of the Guatemala National Police.

"So," the Major said. "This will not be long. I am sorry to inconvenience you but I must file a report. In this case there is twenty thousand dollars in uncut diamonds. Mr. Rudolph appears to

have been a thief. The knife that killed Mr. McGuire, the co-pilot, apparently belonged to Mr. Rudolph, and was used by him."

"How do you know that, Major?" Shayne asked.

Major Estaban was a small, slender, handsome man who clearly prided himself on his immaculate uniform. But he was obviously intelligent and shrewd, also. Now Major Estaban looked at Shayne.

"You are Mr. Shayne?" the Major said. "Captain Jones, your pilot, has informed me of your help. We are both grateful. However, Mr. Shayne, I have also heard of your tendency to see crime where there is no crime. It is an American habit, I fear."

The Major was smiling as he said this, and Shayne grinned back at the small policeman.

"I still want to know how you know it was Rudolph's knife?"

"Simple, Mr. Shayne. It has his initials on it," the Major said. "It fits into a sheath that is here in the attache case. It answers the description of the weapon used to kill the guard in Miami. And, alas, it has on it only one set of fingerprints. Your Chief Gentry, naturally, sent us Mr. Rudolph's fingerprints with his request that we detain Mr. Rudolph. The prints match. Enough, Mr. Shayne?"

"I surrender," Shayne said. "The knife is Mr. Rudolph's."

THE MILK-RUN MURDER

"And he had to be the man who used it. There are no other prints, and no smudges to indicate the use of gloves by some other party," Major Estaban said.

"Rudolph killed McGuire," Shayne said. "I agree."

"Thank you, Mr. Shayne," the Major said mildly.

Shayne tugged at his left earlobe in the stifling heat of the room. Rudolph had killed McGuire, yes. But Shayne was still very much bothered by the remarkable coincidence of a man who fell from an aircraft while the police were waiting to arrest him as soon as the plane landed. Possibly Rudolph had jumped. But that was hard for Shayne to accept. Known jewel thieves who are willing to kill for their loot are not likely to commit suicide.

And why had Rudolph killed McGuire, the co-pilot? All Shayne had to do was keep silent, let Estaban complete his routine questions, and then go about his business and relax in tropical luxury on a well-earned vacation. But all his instincts told him that something was very odd about all this. Perhaps he would know more when Lucy Hamilton answered his radiogram.

In the meantime, Mike Shayne sat back and listened to Major Miguel Estaban conduct his polite, but efficient, interrogation.

"Let me see," the Major said, "Mr. Mellon. You are here on a



business trip. You did not know Mr. Rudolph?"

"No," Mellon said as he smoked another cigarette. "I never saw the man before I talked to him at the airport."

"You appear nervous?" Estaban said.

"Airplanes. I don't like them really," Mellon said. "That door opening scared the hell out of me."

"Of course," the Major said. "Did you see anything of Mr. Rudolph or the co-pilot?"

"No," Mellon said. "I saw the little guy in the grey suit walk past me once, that was all. Never did see the co-pilot go back. I was watching the ground."

Neither of the elderly Americans remembered seeing Mr. Rudolph do anything. They thought that the small thief had been sitting forward. They remembered seeing Rudolph board the DC-3 in Miami. "He spoke to us. I remember that distinctly. But he

must have been sitting forward."

"And you people?" Major Estaban asked the hard-eyed blonde and her husband. "Mr. and Mrs. Farley?"

"I gave the little guy a light at the airport in Miami," Mr. Farley said. "I saw him walk up the aisle once. I also saw the co-pilot go back, maybe a half hour before the little guy took the brodie."

Shayne spoke up. "Ask them why they jumped six feet when they heard my name."

"So?" Major Miguel said. "You knew Mr. Shayne?"

"We've heard of him," Farley said. "Look, I'll be honest with you. I'm Farley, only the lady ain't exactly Mrs. Farley. Okay? I mean, there we were, you know, and then came the startling announcement that there was a private peeper aboard. Naturally we got kind of worried."

"I see," Major Estaban said, and he smiled at Shayne. The handsome Major shrugged delicately. Then he spoke in Spanish to the last passengers, the young couple. Estaban listened to the young man, and then nodded. The Major translated for Shayne's benefit.

"They were sitting forward. They were very frightened, as it was their first flight," the Major explained. "They did not see Mr. Rudolph at all after he spoke to them at the Miami airport."

Captain Jones had never left

his seat at the controls. He hadn't worried about the co-pilot, McGuire, because they frequently took long rests on the run. McGuire had been gone for over an hour, but it had long been their habit to alternate in that way and for one of them to take it easy in the cargo section for most of the flight.

"It's a milk-run," Jones said, "and a DC-3 damn near flies itself. Mack had a hangover, so I didn't think anything of it. Never saw Rudolph at all."

Finally, Major Miguel Estaban took the story of the hostess once more. She told it simply and straight. She had gone back to talk to the co-pilot, had opened the door to the cargo section, had seen Rudolph standing near the hatch with his attache case in his hand. She had started to tell Rudolph that he could not be in the cargo area when the door had blown off. She had shouted a warning, and Rudolph had been sucked out, dropping the case as he went.

"It was so horrible!" the hostess said.

Shayne noticed that the girl seemed quite distraught still, her blonde hair disarrayed, her skirt hiked up above her knees. She had not even noticed the skirt. The skirt itself was heavily wrinkled. Major Estaban seemed to notice the hostess' disarray also, because he spoke very gently.

"Thank you, Miss Novak. I think that will close the matter. You have had a disturbing experience. If you will all sign copies of the statements you have just made, I shall not detain you any longer."

The passengers all filed up to the desk to sign the report. Shayne sat alone and tugged on his left earlobe. He did not like it at all.

V

IN THE HOT room Major Miguel Estaban sat at the desk with his feet up and looked at Mike Shayne. The two men were alone. The other passengers, the hostess, and the pilot, were having some food under the eyes of Miguel's men in the airport restaurant.

"Mr. Shayne," Major Estaban said again, "I cannot hold these people without more than your hunch. I cannot search them without a reason. We have the jewels, and there is no doubt that Rudolph killed McGuire. We have a witness to the accident."

Shayne smoked his third cigarette in succession, and his grey eyes narrowed into hard points like steel.

"I don't like it, Major," Shayne said. "It's much too pat. We don't know *why* Rudolph killed McGuire, and, damn it, twenty thousand isn't much profit for two murders."



The Major sighed wearily. "Accidents do happen, Mr. Shayne. Possibly there was more than that sum involved. I have asked Miami, but Rudolph could have split his loot and have been carrying the rest. As for McGuire, he must have become suspicious of Rudolph."

"Suspicious of what?" Shayne said. "No one on that plane even knew there had been a robbery."

"You have a point. Perhaps McGuire saw something."

"That occurred to me. But what would Rudolph have been doing that would make McGuire suspicious? Even if McGuire *saw* the jewels, as far as anyone knew Rudolph could have been carrying a million in uncut diamonds legitimately."

The Major knitted his brow, as if pondering what Shayne had said. Estaban was obviously a little disturbed. The Major seemed

about to answer Shayne when the telephone in the room rang. Estaban answered in Spanish. Then he handed the receiver to Shayne.

"Your secretary from Miami," he said.

Shayne nodded and took the receiver, a look of relief coming into his eyes. "Hello, angel. You answered my radiogram fast."

"Hello, Michael, you're supposed to be vacationing," the pert voice of his brown-eyed secretary said all the way from Miami.

"Yeh, I attract trouble. What's the story, angel?"

"Well," Lucy Hamilton's voice said. "This Rudolph you asked me to check on has a fairly long record—all jewel robberies. Only one conviction, about five years ago. He was paroled seven months ago. Will Gentry says he was an expert, very experienced. He was in show business at one time."

"I'll applaud later, angel," Shayne said. "What about the robbery? That's what I'm most interested in."

"I'm coming to that, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said. "He got the jewels from a wall safe. A night guard saw him, and Gentry says he killed the guard with a knife. They didn't discover the robbery until after your plane left Miami, and they traced Rudolph to the airport. About all they could do was notify the Guatemala police."

"They traced Rudolph in a few hours?" Shayne said.

"Yes, Michael. Apparently he left a trail a mile wide."

"How much was the loot?"

"About sixty thousand dollars, Michael, a very big haul," Lucy said.

"Thanks, angel, take the day off!" Shayne said. "I love you."

"You only say that when you're a thousand miles away!" Lucy said.

"Because you frighten me, angel."

"I'll try to correct that," Lucy said laughingly. "Be careful, Michael, please?"

"I always am, angel," Shayne said. "I'll be home in two weeks."

After he hung up, Shayne tugged on his earlobe and grinned at Major Estaban. The handsome Major raised an eyebrow as he looked at Shayne.

"You'll get the word officially," Shayne said, "but it was a sixty thousand dollar haul. I was sure something was fishy, Major."

The Major shrugged. "All right, Mr. Shayne, that simply means there were more jewels. Rudolph must have had them on him. Surely you realize I must have more to go on than that. It would be logical for Rudolph to split his loot, just as a safeguard against accidental discovery. He would have wanted to make a quick getaway. He might have suspected that Miami would warn us and if he thought—"

"Yeh," Shayne broke in. "That

figures. He would have prepared some means of escape! But how? Did you examine the hatch opening?"

"Of course."

"Well?"

"The door was not defective, as far as we could determine.

"So it could have been opened from inside!"

"It could have been," the Major agreed. "But why?"

Shayne lighted another cigarette, frowning heavily. His grey eyes were hard as gimlets. He rubbed his big jaw. Then he began to pace the room.

"Have you had any report on the body?" the redhead asked abruptly.

Estaban shook his head. "The British Honduras police think it may never be found. The tides are bad near Belize."

"Rudolph would have known that" Shayne said. "Damn, how about a parachute?"

"No parachute was seen descending," Estaban said. "It would have to mean the hostess was involved. She did not mention a parachute."

"Not necessarily," Shayne pointed out. "She was shocked, startled. She could have failed to notice that Rudolph had a parachute. No one saw him fall after he went out. Only the hostess saw him go out, and she didn't look down after him."

"Where could he have hidden

the parachute, Shayne, assuming he did have one?"

"Maybe in the attache case? That could have been what McGuire saw!"

The Major shook his head. "That case is far too small to contain a parachute."

"You're right," Shayne said. The detective pulled harder at his left earlobe. His bushy red eyebrows were knit in deep concentration. "But it could have been what McGuire saw. That's still the key, Major. Why was McGuire killed? You know, I've got the damndest hunch I'm missing something."

The handsome major nodded sympathetically. It was the professional understanding of one policeman for another.

"We both could be missing something, Shayne," Major Estaban said, "but we only know that Rudolph had more jewels than we found. He must have been carrying them when he fell. As for McGuire's murder, there can be no doubt that Rudolph killed him. But who knows what McGuire saw? Rudolph was obviously trying to hide."

"I guess you're right," Shayne said. "That beard was easy to spot."

"You yourself only noticed him once, after you saw him at the Miami airport."

"He must have just stayed out of sight back with the cargo until

Miss Novak saw him go out," Shayne said. "It sure knocked her for a loop, all that make-up on her collar and . . ." Shayne stopped short. The detective blinked his grey eyes rapidly.

"I must release them, Shayne," the Major said. "I cannot detain United States citizens for too long without . . ."

"What did you say?" Shayne broke in. "Earlier, about Miami! The Miami airport! Major, let me see a copy of your report—the statements they all made!"

The handsome Major shrugged, and handed Shayne the report. Shayne read it through, swiftly but carefully. When he had finished he lighted another cigarette and blew long streams of smoke into the hot air of the room. At last Shayne put down the report and looked at the Major.

"Give me five minutes," he said. "Get them all back in here for five minutes, and get the reports you have on all of them!"

VI

THE SEVEN PASSENGERS, the hostess, and Captain Jones all sat in the stifling room. They looked more than a little annoyed by now. Mellon protested loudly, and Farley, and the spurious Mrs. Farley, threatened action. Captain Jones was concerned about Miss Novak.

"Look, Major," the Captain

said, "I'm responsible for my crew. I've already lost a co-pilot. I don't want to lose my hostess through shock and exhaustion!"

Major Miguel Estaban looked at Shayne. "Well, Shayne?"

The big, red-headed detective was watching Captain Jones closely. His gaunt face was grim, and his grey eyes seemed to bore straight into the pilot's uniform.

"It's just too easy, Rudolph's going out like that," Shayne said. "I've just re-read all your statements. One thing strikes me as very peculiar. We all saw Rudolph at the airport in Miami. In fact, *he made a point of making us see him*. Mellon, you remembered him, apparently. He spoke to our older couple there. And Mr. and Mrs. Farley gave him a light at Miami when he asked for one. The young couple also exchanged a few brief words with him at the airport. They're very certain about that.

"Only Captain Jones didn't see Rudolph at all. And on the plane the rest of us saw him only once—when he walked back down the aisle to the rear! We *all* saw him in Miami; but none of us saw him again except once. Miss Novak, of course, saw him fall!"

Major Estaban objected. "We went over that, Shayne. We agreed he must have been hiding in the cargo section."

"Maybe," Shayne said. "But one thing has puzzled me all

along. Why did Rudolph kill McGuire?"

Shayne again turned his hard grey eyes toward the pilot. "Jones," he said, "you said on the plane that a hostess was supposed to handle difficult situations without succumbing to panic. You said your job was bad enough without *inexperienced hostesses!* Exactly how inexperienced is Miss Novak?"

The Captain seemed puzzled. "Well, this was only her third run with us. But she came from an American airlines training school with an excellent record. It's a handicap, I'm afraid, to be the only hostess. Unfortunately, we only carry one hostess. As you know, the big airlines carry more."

There was an embarrassed silence in the heat of the room. Miss Novak brushed her blonde hair back as she looked at Shayne, and pulled her skirt down over her exposed knees. She seemed suddenly angry.

"I'm sorry if I failed to be as efficient as you expected Mr. Shayne," Miss Novak said. "But I can't see—"

"I think you are very efficient," Shayne said mildly. "Were you ever in show business, Miss Novak?"

"Certainly not!" the hostess snapped.

Shayne turned to Estaban. "Major, read the report you have on Miss Novak."



Major Miguel Estaban picked up a piece of paper.

"Miss Greta Novak, age twenty-six, five feet seven inches tall . . . well, never mind that. Here, this is what you want. Graduated from a good airlines hostess training school, applied for hostess job with Gulf of Mexico Airlines, furnished references, diploma, and full medical report from her family doctor. Has flown three scheduled runs including this last one, has . . ."

"That'll do it, Major," Shayne said. "You know, Miss Novak is the only person who saw Rudolph fall from the aircraft. Now I'm beginning to wonder . . ."

Suddenly Shayne picked up a paperweight from the desk. He stepped toward Miss Novak and threw the object into her lap. Startled, the hostess clapped her legs together to catch the paper-

weight. Her skirt bunched up between her legs as she brought her thighs together. The paperweight rested on top of her legs. Shayne nodded grimly as Miss Novak stared down in consternation at the object in her lap.

"She furnished a medical examination from her own doctor," Shayne said. "I wondered about the way she kept forgetting to pull her skirt down, and about her failure to notice all that make-up on her collar. She wears a lot of pancake makeup. It covers up a one-day growth of beard, I guess. Your airline doesn't have its own doctors to make physical exams, does it, Captain?"

"We're a two-bit airline, Shayne," Jones said. "We can't afford doctors."

Miss Novak gave a low, strangled cry, and reached inside her blouse to her brassiere. Her hand came out clutching a tiny silvered automatic. She kicked off her high-heels, and leaped toward the door of the over-heated room.

She never made it. Major Miguel Estaban hit her once on the jaw and she went down in a heap of skirt and stockings. Shayne walked over and pulled at her blonde hair.

The blonde wig came off in Shayne's hand. Without the wig Miss Novak had very short brown hair. Shayne opened the hostess' blouse, unhooked the brassiere, and removed it. Miss Novak had

a very smooth and small chest for a man.

"Meet the vanishing Mr. Rudolph," Shayne said as everyone stared at the small man in stockings and skirt.

LATER SHAYNE completed his statement in Major Estaban's downtown office. The Major laughed as he recalled the look on "Miss Novak's" face as "she" had stared down at the paperweight.

"I remembered that trick from a Mark Twain book," Shayne said. "A woman nearly always *opens her legs* to catch something in her lap, knowing that her skirt will catch the object. It's a habit. A man brings his legs together, so the object won't fall through."

"Rudolph had been a female impersonator on the stage," the Major said. "We just got the report. The airlines diploma was forged, of course. Gulf of Mexico Line is careless."

"He counted on that," Shayne said.

"He was very good," the Major said. "I had considerable interest in 'Miss Novak' myself." He frowned and shook his head.

"He looked like an attractive woman, all right," Shayne said dryly. "Only there was something about 'her' all along—the way 'she' sat, the way 'she' rubbed her chin. And, of course, all that pancake makeup. She *opened* her legs to stand up once. A woman closes

her legs and stands up sideways. Watch them sometime.

"The false beard was a nice touch. Of course, McGuire saw Rudolph changing back into 'Miss Novak' after that one walk up the aisle to prove he was aboard. So he killed McGuire. That was the real key all along."

"A clever plan," Estaban said.

"Who would have doubted that Rudolph had indeed fallen out? Only you, Shayne. It was a shrewd deduction."

"Too much coincidence," Shayne said.

Two hours later Shayne was basking in the tropical sun, and almost wishing the hostess had been a real woman.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

DRINK UP—AND DIE!

A COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When two men walked into an elegant cocktail lounge in Miami Beach and asked for an extra dry Martini with a twist of lemon Mike Shayne's private-eye world began to vibrate. But the redhead wasn't even aware of that until the whole edifice began to quake and spell out murder!



NO WAY OUT

A New SLOT MACHINE KELLY Story

by DENNIS LYND

NEXT TO WINE, women, and whisky, Slot-Machine Kelly's favorite kick was reading those real puzzle type mysteries. You know, the kind where the victim gets his on top of a flagpole and they can't find the weapon because it was an icicle and melted away.

"There was this one I liked special," Slot-Machine said to Joe Harris. "Guy was knocked off in an attic room. The guy was alone,

there was a cop right outside the door, and another cop was down in the street watching the one window. The guy got shot twice—once from far, once from real close. Oh, yes—and there were powder burns on him. The cops got into the room in one second flat, and there was no one there except the stiff. How about that, baby?"

"I'm crazy with suspense," Joe

*Slot-Machine was irked! What
right had an impossible murder,
to take place in real life?*

said as he mopped the bar with his specially dirty rag.

"Simple," Slot explained. "The killer shot from another attic across the street; that was the first shot. Then he tossed the gun across, through the window, and it hit the floor. It had a hair trigger, and it just happened to hit the victim again!"

"You're kidding," Joe said. "You mean somonee wants you to believe odds like that?"

"It's possible," Slot said.

"So's snow in July," Joe said. "The guy who wrote that one drinks cheaper booze than you do."

"Don't just promise, pour," Slot-Machine said.

Slot-Machine liked these wild stories because things like that never happened in his world. When he got a murder it was ninety-nine percent sure to be something about as exotic as a drunk belting his broad with a beer bottle in front of forty-two talkative witnesses at high noon.

"Did you know that ninety percent of all murders are committed by guys with criminal records," Slot went on informatively. "The victim usually has a record, too, and they usually know each other? A lot of them take place in

bars. It's near midnight, and both guys are swinging on the gargle."

"And the bartender gets hauled in for serving whisky to drunks," Joe said.

"Life is dull," Slot sighed.

Which was why this time Slot-Machine Kelly was not even aware that he had a puzzler until it happened. Things like this just didn't happen in Slot-Machine's world. When they did there had to be a logical explanation and a reason.



In the real world a man has to figure the odds and forget about guns with improbable hair-triggers. Only no matter how you sliced it, there was no reason for the guard to be dead, no way the rubies could have been stolen, and no way out of that tenth story room. It was one hundred percent impossible. But it had happened.

It all started with the usual routine. Mr. Jason Moomer, of Moomer, Moomer, and McNamara, Jewel Merchants, came to Slot's dusty office one bright morning with a job offer. The morning was bright, but Slot-Machine wasn't. He was nursing a fine hangover from a bottle of Lafite-Rothschild '53 he had found in Nussbaum's Liquor Store. The price had been right, and Slot had killed the bottle happily over a plebeian steak.

"It was the brandy afterwards," Slot explained to Moomer. "Speak soft, my skull's wide open."

"For this job, you stay sober," Moomer said.

"Don't ask for miracles," Slot said.

"You did a good job for us before," Moomer said. "My partners think you're not reliable, but I vouched for you."

"You're a brave man," Slot said.

"You know the set-up," Moomer said. "We're displaying the rubies in a suite at the North American Hotel. They're on display all

day for three days, and they're locked in the safe at night. Twenty-four hour watch on all doors, at the safe, with the jewels when they're out. We're hiring three shifts of Burns guards, five men to a shift to cover the three doors, the safe, and the elevators, just in case. We're hiring a private detective to work with each shift, to keep his eyes and ears open."

"You got more protection than a South American Dictator," Slot-Machine said.

"There are five rubies, a matched set. They're worth perhaps a quarter of a million dollars."

"Maybe you need the Army," Slot-Machine said.

"You'll change shifts each day," Moomer went on, ignoring Slot's witicism. "I'm hiring Ed Green, and Manny Lewis for the other shifts. You'll all wear uniforms, so you'll look like ordinary guards."

"A tight set-up," Slot said.

Slot-Machine disliked regular work, and he particularly disliked uniformed-guard work. But, as usual, his bank account looked like a tip for a hashhouse waitress, and Joe's current employer was already beginning to count the shots in the Irish whisky bottle every time Slot appeared in Joe's bar.

"You got a deal," Slot said. "I have a little free time. You're lucky."

"Well," Moomer said, "if you're

so busy, you won't need any money in advance."

"You're dreaming again," Slot said.

Moomer grinned, paid \$50 in advance, and left. Slot counted the money four times. He sighed unhappily. It always came out to \$50. He hated clients who could count. At least, he decided, it would be easy work except for the wear and tear on his feet.

He was wrong. Before it was over, he had a dead man, five missing rubies, a very unfriendly Jason Moomer, a suspicious Captain Gazzo, and a room from which there was no way out except for a bird.

FOR TWO DAYS all the trouble Slot-Machine had was tired feet. The suite in the North American was crowded with ruby-lovers, and jewelry dealers who loved only money, for the whole two days. The uniformed guards, and the three private detectives, earned their pay.

During the day the guard at the elevator checked credentials. Slot-Machine knew that this was necessary, but it was not a very valuable precaution. Moomer, Moomer and McNamara wanted to see their rubies sold, and almost anyone could get an invitation.

There were three doors to the suite. Two were locked on both sides, but a uniformed guard was stationed at each door anyway, as

an additional security measure. The third door was the only entrance and exit to the suite. The Burns man there kept his pistol in plain sight. There was no need for guards on the windows, for the suite was ten floors up without a fire escape.

The fifth Burns guard stood like an eagle-eyed statue right behind the display case. It would have taken an invisible man with wings to steal the rubies during the day. Which did not stop the Messrs. Moomer and McNamara from prowling like frightened hyenas.

"If you see anything suspicious, get to the alarm fast," Jason Moomer explained to the guard at the display case. "The alarm is wired in to the case itself, but there's the extra switch, just in case."

"You're in charge of your shift, Kelly," Maximillian Moomer said. "Just stay sober!"

Old Maximillian did not like Slot-Machine. That came from the fee Slot had charged for finding a stolen diamond tiara a few years ago. Maximillian was a skin-flint, and he had always suspected Slot of stealing the tiara and returning it for the handsome fee. Slot hadn't, but he had thought it a good idea.

"Bringing in detectives is ridiculous anyway," Maximillian Moomer said. "The uniformed guards are enough."

"I think we should have had the showing in our own strong

room," Angus McNamara said. The tall Scotsman seemed the most nervous of the three owners.

But nothing happened for the first two days, and at night everything was quiet. The Burns men remained on guard at all the doors, the elevator remained under watch, and the man inside the suite camped in front of the safe.

Day or night, Slot-Machine Kelly, Ed Green, and Manny Lewis kept a roving eye on everything as they wandered through the rooms and halls in their uniforms. The detectives could not be told from the other Burns guards. For two days Slot-Machine cat-footed through the four rooms, eyeing the rubies and the guests, and sneaking some of the free liquor when no one was looking. The only incident occurred on the second day when Slot was off duty.

Ed Green was on duty at the time. It happened just as the day-shift was going off. The swing-shift guards had taken their stations, and Ed Green was talking to Manny Lewis outside the room, when the alarm went off like a scared air-raid siren.

People started to mill and shout. Manny Lewis ran to check the other doors. Ed Green and the uniformed guards poured into the main room and surrounded the display case. The guard at the case already had his gun out.

"What is it!" Green had snapped.

A very nervous, and embarrassed young woman stood near the alarm switch. "I turned it," she said. "I'm sorry. I thought it was for the waiter."

Green swore angrily, and the Moomer brothers insisted that the attractive offender be taken to the police. The young woman did not seem to mind too much. She checked out nice and clean; she was the legitimate secretary of a small merchant named Julius Honder.

"The dame was just curious," Green said to Slot-Machine. "At least we got sort of a drill."

The guard system had worked fine. No one on the doors had left his post, and the Moomers and McNamara seemed happier. The final precaution, the electronic scanner that was set up to cover the elevators during the day, and the single exit from the lobby of the hotel at night, was working perfectly.

"It's a vacation with pay," Slot told Joe before he went on duty on the third day. "A cockroach couldn't get into that room, and a germ couldn't get out."

It happened on the third day.

Slot-Machine had the lobster shift on the third day—midnight to eight o'clock in the weary morning. He had stopped for a couple of quick whiskies at Joe's tavern, and when he arrived he had to hurry into his uniform. The five

Burns men of his shift were ready and waiting.

Ed Green greeted Slot-Machine. After the shift had been changed, and Slot's men were in their places at the locked doors and in front of the safe, Green and Slot had a cigarette just outside the main door to the suite. The Burns men of Green's shift relaxed in the hallway.

The two shots exploded the silence a second or two before the alarm went off.

The shots were inside the suite. The alarm clanged like a wounded elephant.

"Come on!" Green shouted.

The Burns guards poured into the suite. They all rushed into the room where the safe was.

"Stay alert!" Slot snapped to his Burns man who was on the front door.

He watched his man pull his gun and stand alert, and then he hurried inside the suite and into the room where the safe was. The first thing he saw was the open safe. The second thing he saw was the body of the guard lying in front of the safe with Ed Green bending over it.

"Twice, right through the heart!" Green said.

"Search the place!" Slot snapped. "Tear it apart."

Slot-Machine and Green checked the safe. It was clean as a whistle. It had been neatly and expertly burned open. The torch



was still on the floor. The safe was a small one, and it had not taken much burning.

Ed Green called the police.

Slot-Machine called the Burns men on the single night exit from the hotel downstairs, and told them to start the scanner and let no one out of the hotel without checking them. By this time all the Burns guards had torn the apartment apart, and had found nothing at all.

By the time Captain Gazzo of Homicide arrived, in company with Sergeant Jonas and Lieutenant Mingo of Safe and Loft, the Moomers and McNamara were also there. Maximillian Moomer was almost hysterical.

"Search them all! Search Kelly! No one could have gotten in or out of this room!" Maximillian wailed.

"He's got a point," Captain Gazzo said to Slot-Machine.

"Green and I were together," Slot said.

"I wouldn't trust Green too far, either," Sergeant Jonas said.

Lieutenant Mingo had finished his examination of the suite. Now he broke in on the hysterical owners of the rubies.

"Here it is, Captain. Safe was torched—an easy job. All windows are locked inside. A caterpillar couldn't have come up or down those walls outside anyway. The torch is still here. We searched all the guards, nothing on them. The Burns men on the doors never left their posts."

Gazzo turned to the Burns man who had remained at the front

door of the suite the whole time.

"No one came out?"

"No sir," The Burns man said. "I never budged. The guy at the elevators never moved, and no one came out except Green, Kelly, and the other guards."

"In other words," Gazzo said. "No one went in, no one came out. Only—we've got a dead man and we don't have five rubies worth a quarter of a million in real cold money."

In the room everyone looked at everyone else. The Moomers and McNamara were ready to cry like babies.

IT WAS AN hour later, and Gazzo and Mingo had been over and over the situation fifty times with Slot-Machine Kelly and Ed Green. The morgue wagon had come, and the white-suited attendants were packing the body in its final basket.

"The Burns boys from my shift want to go home," Green said. "We've searched every part of them except their appendix."

"Okay," Gazzo said. "But you'd better check them through that scanner downstairs, just in case."

"That's some machine," Lieutenant Mingo said, admiringly. "You just dab the rubies with a little radioactive material, and the scanner spots them forty feet away."

"It also spots radium watch dials and false teeth," Gazzo

pointed out. "Let's get back to our little puzzle, okay? First how did anyone get into the room?"

Everyone looked blank. Slot-Machine rubbed the stump of his missing arm. It was an old habit he had when he was thinking.

"It's impossible," Slot-Machine said, "so there has to be an answer. Look at the odds. It's a million to one against the guy being invisible. It's two million to one against him having wings. It's a couple of hundred to one against that guard having shot himself."

"Very funny, Kelly," Gazzo said.

"Wait," Slot-Machine said. "I'm serious. We got to rule out science-fiction, weird tales, and magic. So how did he get *into* the room past all of Green's guards? Be simple. There's only one way—he was already in the room."

"Kelly's shootin' the vein again," Jonas said.

Even the morgue attendants turned to look at Slot-Machine. They had the body by head and feet, and they paused with it in mid-air, their mouths open. Gazzo looked disgusted. But Ed Green and Lieutenant Mingo did not.

"He's right," Ed Green said. "We never searched, never thought of it."

"It's not an uncommon MO," Lieutenant Mingo agreed. "Now that I think of it, the suite is full of closets piled with junk. It wouldn't have been hard as long

as the guy knew the guards didn't search."

Captain Gazzo morosely watched the morgue attendants close their basket and carry it out. The Captain did not seem very pleased about the whole matter.

"Which means the joint was cased," Gazzo said. "Okay, it figures. Our ghost has to be a pro. He got in by hiding here for about five hours. Now how did he get out?"

"Yeh," Sergeant Jonas said. "You guys didn't search the place because a snake couldn't have sneaked out of this suite."

"You had twelve guards around and in the suite, damn it," Gazzo said. "Twelve! A worm couldn't have crawled out!"

Slot-Machine seemed to be watching something very interesting in the center of the far wall. His one good hand was busily rubbing away at the stump of his left arm. Now he began to talk without taking his eyes away from the blank wall.

"Let's talk it out," Slot said. "He didn't fly out, he didn't crawl out, he didn't dig out, he . . ."

"Trap door?" Sergeant Jonas said.

Lieutenant Mingo shook his head.

"First thing I checked. The floors are solid. Checked the rooms below, too," Mingo added.

"Secret doors in the walls?" Gazzo suggested.

"Hell, Captain," Ed Green said, "we know a little about our work. We went over the walls with a microscope."

Slot rubbed his stump and nodded. "Keep it up, we're ruling out. Look, the guy was a pro, he was in the room, he had to have his plan to get out. It had to be workable. It has to be simple."

"Maybe he's still inside the room!" Green said.

"Negative," Mingo replied. "I combed the place."

"What do we have," Slot-Machine said. "He's in here, and there are eleven guards outside and one inside with him. He shoots the guard, torches the safe, and . . . Hold on! That's not right. He burned that safe fast, but not fast enough to do it between the time of the shots and all of us busting in."

"So he must have torched the safe *first*—then shot the guard and set off the alarm! He couldn't have torched the safe with the guard still awake, so it follows that he must have knocked the guard out. But why did he kill the guard later? He knew the shots would bring us running. He must have *wanted* the shots to bring us in just when it happened! Why did he pull the job at the exact moment when there were twelve guards instead of six? He timed it for the shift change!"

There was a long silence in the room. Sergeant Jonas looked

blank. Ed Green was obviously trying to think. Mingo shook his head. Only Gazzo seemed to see what Slot-Machine was seeing on the blank wall.

"No one came out," Gazzo said softly. "There was no way out. Only a killer got out with five rubies. So, like Kelly says, we rule out magic, and somehow a guy walked out."

Gazzo turned to the Burns guard who had been on the main door.

"Do you know *all* the guards who work with you?" Gazzo asked.

"Sure, Captain," the Burns man said. "Well, I mean, I know most of them to look at. I know the boys in my shift, and—"

"Yeh," Gazzo cut him short. "There it is. So damned simple. He just walked out in the confusion. Right, Kelly? He was probably behind the front door waiting. He probably even helped search the suite with all of you. He was just . . ."

"Wearing a Burns uniform!" Slot-Machine said. "He simply mingled in with us. That's why he timed it for two shifts to be here. He mingled with us, and walked out through the front door!"

The swearing in the room would have done credit to a Foreign Legion barrack. Everyone began to move at once. Mingo called in to alert the Safe and Loft Squad to start watching all fences in the city. Ed Green went to check with the guard on the elevator. Jonas called

downstairs to the single exit door. Gazzo just swore. Ed Green came back.

"Burns man on the elevator says he did see a Burns man go for the stairs!" Green said. "God, he was lucky! How could he know we wouldn't search him? I mean, we searched all the guards mighty quick. He couldn't be sure he could get away so fast! He took a hell of a risk!"

Sergeant Jonas hung up the telephone in anger.

"Green's shift of Burns men passed out twenty minutes ago," Jonas said, "and they were all clean. That scanner didn't find anything on them."

"How many men?" Gazzo said.

"Six," Jonas said.

Gazzo cursed. "He's out!"

"But the rubies aren't," Green said. "He must have stashed them somewhere inside. That means he plans to come back for them."

Slot-Machine shook his head. "I don't know. He planned this mighty careful. We could searched him right here in the room like Green says."

"All right, genius," Gazzo said. "You've figured how he got into the suite, and how he got out. Now tell us how he plans to get the stones out if he didn't stash them. No one's gone out of this hotel since it happened, except through that front door where the scanner is!"

"He just had to know about the

scanner," Slot-Machine said. "This was a fool-proof plan. So he must have figured a way around that scanner."

"Great," Gazzo said. "Only no one got out of here without being checked."

Slot-Machine stood up suddenly.

"One person did! Gazzo, come on!"

Slot-Machine led them all from the suite in a fast dash for the first elevator.

THE NIGHT WAS dark on the city. The streets were bare and cold in the night. Traffic moved in small, tight groups down Sixth Avenue as the lights changed like small packs of animals. The late night revelers staggered their weary way home. In the all night delicatessens the clerks yawned behind their counters through the gaudy plate-glass windows.

In Gazzo's unmarked car, the five sat alert and waiting. Gazzo swore softly, and Ed Green smoked hard on his cigarette. Slot-Machine leaned forward tensely and watched the car-exit from below the towering glass and steel of the North American Hotel. Suddenly, Slot leaned over and touched Jonas who was behind the wheel.

The morgue wagon came out from under the hotel and turned left down Sixth Avenue. Jonas eased the car away from the curb

and followed the morgue wagon.

They drove down Sixth Avenue, turned across town toward the west, and the morgue wagon moved steadily on its way a half a block away. The silent procession turned again on Ninth Avenue and continued on downtown toward the Morgue.

Suddenly, as the morgue wagon slowed at a traffic light that was just changing from red to green on the staggered light system of Ninth Avenue, the back door of the wagon opened. A man jumped out. The man hit the pavement, stumbled, and then began to run fast toward the west.

The man wore the uniform of a Burns guard.

The morgue wagon continued on its grim journey. Jonas swung the police car in a squealing turn and gunned the motor down the side street. The running man was forty feet ahead. Jonas roared after him. The man heard the motor, looked back, and then dashed toward a fence. In a flash he was over the fence and gone.

Slot-Machine and Gazzo were out of the police car before Jonas had brought it to a halt. Mingo and Green were close behind them. Slot-Machine was the first of the three over the fence with a powerful pull of his single arm.

The man in the Burns uniform was scrambling over a second fence just ahead.

The chase went on down the

rows of back yards and fences in the silent darkness of the night. At each fence Slot-Machine gained on the uniformed runner. As he went over the last fence before a looming, dark building ended the row of back yards, the uniformed man turned and shot.

Slot-Machine ducked, but didn't stop. He went over the last fence in a mad leap and dive. Another shot hit just below him, and wood splinters cut his cheek. In the next second, Slot-Machine was on the uniformed man who was trying frantically to get off one more shot.

The man in uniform never made it. Slot-Machine drove him back against the brick wall of the building with the force of his rush. His pivoting body slammed into the wall, his gun went flying, and he came off the wall like a rebounding cue ball on a lively pool table.

Slot's one good hand caught the uniformed man across the throat. He collapsed with a single choking squawk like the dying gurgle of a beheaded chicken.

By the time Gazzo, Green, and Mingo had caught up with Slot and his victim, Slot was holding the rubies in his hand. In the beam of light from Mingo's flashlight, the deep red stones shone like wet blood.

Slot-Machine handed the pistol to Gazzo.

"This'll be the murder weapon," he said. "It's a regulation Burns pistol, he was a meticulous type."

Mingo was bending over the supine man who had not even begun to wake up. The Lieutenant looked up at Gazzo and shook his head.

"No one I recognize," Mingo said. "Chances are he's not a known jewel thief."

"That figures," Slot said. "I think you'll find his name is Julius Honder, a legitimate jewel merchant."

"Why Honder?" Ed Green said.

"He had to have cased the job," Slot said. "He knew we'd all go running into the suite. Remember that woman? The one who thought the alarm was a waiter's button? She was Honder's secretary. I expect we'll find her waiting at Honder's office for the boss to bring home the loot."

From the dark, Sergeant Jonas came up. The Homicide Sergeant looked down at the sleeping killer and thief.

"So he made another change," Jonas said, "and played one of the morgue boys?"

Slot-Machine shook his head.

"Too risky," Slot-Machine said. "Gazzo said no one had gotten out of the building through the front door. You don't take a stiff out the front way, right? He knew that. The stiff went out through the basement. What tipped me was what I said myself—why did he kill the guard *after* he'd opened the safe and got the stones? To get us into the room, I said.

"Only the *alarm* alone would have done that. There had to be another reason. All at once it came to me. He killed the guard just to have a way of hiding the stones on the body and getting them out!"

They all looked down at the uniformed man who was just beginning to groan as he came awake. There was a certain admiration in the eyes of the police.

"He knew we wouldn't search the dead man until you got him to the morgue," Slot-Machine said. "So he had to get the stones from the body before it reached the slab. It was quite simple. He just hid in the wagon. Who would think to look for him there?"

Later, in the tavern where Joe Harris was working, Ed Green leaned on the bar beside Slot-Machine Kelly and bought Slot a fourth expensive Irish whisky. Green was still admiring Slot.

"You just got to think logical," Slot-Machine explained. "Figure the odds. Miracles are out, so there has to be a simple explanation. The more complicated it looks in real life, the simpler it has to be when you figure it out."

"You make it sound easy," Green said. "Have another shot."

"Twist his arm," Joe said as he poured. "The thinker. So it turned out it was Julius Honder, right?"

"Yeh," Slot said as he tasted his Irish whisky happily. "He needed cash. Too bad he needed a corpse. He'll fry crisp as bacon."

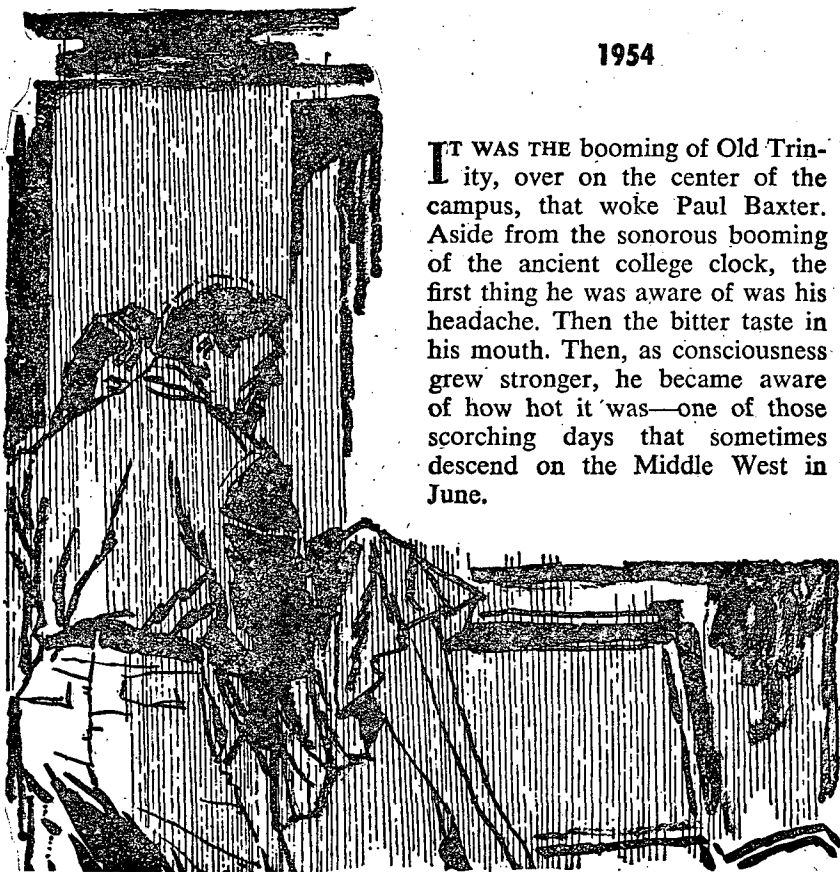
THE MORNING AFTER

A Chilling and Unusual Novelet

by ANDREW WEST

1954

IT WAS THE booming of Old Trinity, over on the center of the campus, that woke Paul Baxter. Aside from the sonorous booming of the ancient college clock, the first thing he was aware of was his headache. Then the bitter taste in his mouth. Then, as consciousness grew stronger, he became aware of how hot it was—one of those scorching days that sometimes descend on the Middle West in June.



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*The memory of a man who drinks heavily
may play cruel tricks on him. But the corpse in Paul
Baxter's bed seemed peculiarly outrageous.*

With an effort he sat up, the movement sending echoes of pain screaming through his skull, and forced his eyes open. It was with relief that he saw he was in his own tiny two-room apartment in the old apartment building the University had taken over for graduate students. But he wasn't in bed. Fully dressed, he had been sprawled on the old couch in the living room.

His clothes were sodden with perspiration and his throat ached with dryness. His mouth held a taste like bitter mould. Oh, God, but he must have hoisted them at the party last night—the graduation party to celebrate the fact that he was through with the long grind of law school at last, and launched upon a career almost guaranteed to be brilliant before it even began.

And he shouldn't drink, he couldn't drink. He knew it, he'd proved it, he'd made resolutions not to. For a year he hadn't had as much as a beer. But how often did you graduate number one from the toughest law school in the Middle West, engaged to a

girl as beautiful as Susan Davenport, assured of a job in Freeman Davenport's famous legal firm in Chicago? You only did it once and you had a right to celebrate.

But why hadn't Steve or Bert stopped him? Steve Jennings and Bert Forrest, his two best friends during undergraduate days—Steven bean-thin and owl-solemn so that his wild humor seemed hilariously funny, Bert a chubby pixy who egged Steve on. Had they got him drunk for a joke, because he was too intense, too solemn, too dedicated even for a lawyer—"Pompous Paul," as Bert sometimes called him?

No, they wouldn't do that, they knew how he acted when he was drunk. And now he could remember, though the effort sent new screams of pain racing through his skull.

That first drink at the Old Mill had been his own idea. Bert and Steve had tried to stop him from taking the second, but there was no stopping him short of total blackout. So they had gone on, the party getting steadily more hilarious. He remembered the

gang that had formed around them—Larry Something, Pete, Charley, faceless names and nameless faces, newly hatched lawyers like himself and medics like Bert and Steve, all of them suddenly intoxicated not only by liquor but by the sudden completion of studies that at times had seemed endless.

He remembered the fight that had started in the Old Mill and how they had been thrown out, only to pile into cars to go someplace else. Had he started the fight? He couldn't remember. Probably. His hair-trigger temper, his insane violence when he was drinking! But obviously Bert and Steve had kept him out of trouble.

Anyway, he was here, with only a terrible hangover, even though he couldn't remember where they had gone or what they had done. He had probably even got himself home. He could go for hours seeming perfectly in control of himself, just a little tipsy, even though he was stoned to the toes, blacked-out completely as far as memory went.

Oh God, he thought, just so Susan doesn't hear about last night! Susan and her father. If they learned about it, it would write *finis* to his marriage to Susan, his job with Davenport, Clark and Thompson, his whole carefully planned career, the rich reward of all his years of grinding study.

As he crouched on the edge of

the couch, holding his head, hoping desperately that the throbbing in his skull would ease, he was mentally counting the slow and ponderous strokes with which Old Trinity was announcing the Sunday morning hour. He expected them to stop at nine, then at ten, then at eleven. But they went on to twelve before they ceased and he stood up in such desperate haste that the room spun dizzily, his head screamed inside his skull, and his stomach heaved.

Twelve o'clock! And he had a lunch date at half past with Susan and her father to discuss the wedding arrangements! God! He had to shower and shave and dress and get all the way across campus to the hotel in half an hour. Freeman Davenport was a humorless man, a stickler for exactness and punctuality.

Baxter closed his eyes hard to ease the throbbing of his head, the painful pounding that made every thought an effort, and felt his way to the bedroom, beyond which was the bathroom. Opening his eyes only enough to see, he was halfway across the bedroom before he perceived that his bed, the bed he hadn't slept in the night before, was occupied.

At first, his vision still hazy, he thought that Bert or Steve had come home with him. Then he realized that it was a woman's head on the pillow. Bleached blonde hair, limp and straggly,

showed above the pulled-up sheet.

The realization was like a blow that sent a fresh flood of pain through his head. He swayed and had to steady himself by grabbing a chair. What was a woman doing in his room, in his bed? Had he pulled the same stunt again—like the time in his junior year when they had been in Chicago celebrating the team's victory over Northwestern and he'd—

But on that occasion Bert and Steve had got rid of her. This time had he eluded his friends, with the cleverness of the cunning drunk, picked up a woman, brought her back, managed to get her to his apartment in the hush of the early-morning darkness?

But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered except to get her out of there. Fast!

He took two unsteady steps to the side of the bed and shook the sleeping woman's shoulder.

"Hey!" he said urgently. "Hey, wake up! Wake up!"

He shook again and the curiously limp feel of the flesh beneath his fingers puzzled him. Frowning painfully, he pulled at the shoulder he was grasping and with an odd, sluggish motion the woman in his bed rolled over onto her back, her face flopping toward him as her head turned.

It was a small face, perhaps pretty once, but now lined and tired, the complexion mottled.

Washed-out blue eyes were open and staring at him and he started to speak.

"Hey!" he said again, angry now. "You have to get out of here—"

But he bit off the sentence unfinished. The washed-out blue eyes did not change. The face did not change. It couldn't. The woman was dead.

It was only because of his hangover that the realization had been delayed. Those blank eyes, the limp movement, the mouth agape showing bad teeth behind lipstick that was garishly applied like a livid slash! He had seen enough of death during his course at the Medic Building in forensic medicine to know the woman was dead.

But that wasn't the worse. Now that the woman had turned, he could see her scrawny throat—and around her throat were dark, bluish marks, the bruises made by throttling fingers that had choked the life out of her. She had been strangled. Hungover as he was, he knew enough to know that. His course in forensic medicine had been thorough enough for him to be certain.

Numbly, wordlessly, he sat down on the edge of the bed to keep himself from falling as his legs went suddenly wobbly. The motion dislodged the sheet, and he could see that the woman in his bed was wearing a black slip and

nothing else. A cheap black dress lay over the back of a chair. New, cheap black pumps with stockings tucked into them were on their sides beneath the bed.

Paul Baxter fought the impulse to retch, could not control it, and staggered into the bathroom. He came out again five minutes later, weak and dizzy, and dropped into a worn leather chair to stare at the dead woman in his bed. In the tiny room the heat beat at him like a fist.

The woman seemed to be about thirty-five, weighing perhaps a hundred and ten pounds. Her only makeup was the vivid crimson-slashed mouth, the lipstick inexpertly applied. He could not remember ever having seen her before.

But that didn't prove anything. He could go for hours, and be unable to remember anything that had happened to him later. Sober, a woman like this would have disgusted him. But drunk—it was one of the reasons he couldn't, didn't drink. That, and his temper.

Only—last night he *had* drunk. And become drunk. In spite of all the resolutions he had sworn to the year before when only Steve and Bert, coming to his rescue, had saved him from expulsion.

What had happened? He had picked her up—or she had picked him up. He had sneaked her back here to his apartment. Then had

he suddenly become revolted by her, and ordered her to go? Had she refused? Had she demanded money? Maybe threatened to blackmail him? Or had he just become enraged, grabbed her, choked her until she stopped struggling—and then staggered into the other room to pass out?

What had happened? Oh, God, what had happened?

But he could not remember. And really, it didn't matter. It had happened. That was enough. Now his career, his whole life, was to be ruined by this drab, this human cipher, worth nothing to anyone—probably not even to herself—because he had killed her.

He pressed his hands to throbbing temples and tried to think, but his head was full of aching cotton wool. If only he could *think*. Could *plan*. There might be *something* . . .

The knocking at his apartment door must have been going on for half a minute before he became aware of it and got to his feet, swaying like a drunken man.

"Paul!" That was Steve Jennings. "Are you in?"

"Hey, buddy Paul, wake up! We want to say goodbye!" That was Bert Forrest. "Did you get home all right? Everything okay?"

A moment's silence, then one of them beat an imperative tattoo on the door again with impatient knuckles.

"Paul, our plane leaves for the Coast in half an hour!" Steve called. "If you're in, wake up!"

"Oh, he's out already," Paul could hear Bert say, in a lower voice. "I remember now, he had a lunch date with Susan and her dad."

"That's right, he must have gone. Too bad we missed old Pompous Paul," Steve answered. "Boy, how he must have felt this morning! I'd like to have seen his face when he woke up. He must have felt as if the Empire State Building had fallen on him."

"It'll be a long time before buddy Paul takes another drink—I hope," Bert said then. "What a wild man! But it was all fun. Well, listen, we got to go or we'll be flapping our wings to the Coast. He's okay."

Then their laughter was receding down the hall, was gone.

Still Paul stood frozen where he was. He had been tempted to open the door. Beg their help again. But he couldn't. All they could have done was to call the police and later testify to his condition. That would get him off with involuntary manslaughter, maybe.

But what good would that do him with Susan and her father? His wife gone, his job, his future—everything he had slaved for, everything he had sacrificed for—had become 'Pompous Paul' to achieved. No, he couldn't.



Then they were gone and it was too late to change his mind.

He mopped his face dazedly. The sweat was running down his face, his arms, his legs. His clothes were sodden, sticking to him. His hangover and this awful heat—if only he could think!

If he could get the dead woman out of his apartment. That was

the first thing to do. But that was a total impossibility. He might meet someone at any time outside in the hall of the old apartment building. It was the day after graduation and the town was still full of families and friends of the new grads, remaining for University Open House Day. The brilliant Sunday afternoon would mean throngs of people everywhere. He couldn't do it. He couldn't move her from there.

Of course, if he could leave her where she was until night. Then perhaps late, in the quiet darkness, he could get his car from the basement garage and—

The sound of his apartment door being unlocked and opened did not penetrate his benumbed condition, but the voice that followed it did.

"Mister Paul!" It was Old Annie, the indestructible Irish maid, and her voice shocked him into a moment of speechless panic. She was in the living room, not ten feet from the door to the bedroom! And if he didn't answer, she would come in!

"Mister Paul, are you up? I'm coming in anyway!"

"Wait, Annie, wait!" he cried, and almost ran to the door. He flung it open almost in her startled, wrinkled features, slid through, and slammed it shut again. Pressing himself against the closed door, he barred her passage.

"Annie, wait!" Baxter panted. "Don't go in. One of—one of the boys came with me last night. He's sleeping it off."

Annie eyed him scornfully, leaning on her dust mop, the clean sheets and towels over her forearm.

"You're jittery as a jaybird," she said disapprovingly. "What a head you must have. You look as if you were seeing banshees." She clucked her tongue. "Last night was one thing, but I hope you didn't bring a bottle back with you. I tell you now and I've told you before—any time I find a bottle down the sink it goes. Liquor is forbidden in a University building, it just so happens. Though the Lord knows you young gentlemen have very short memories. That being that, now stand aside and let me get my work done. Friend asleep or no friend asleep, I have to change the sheets."

"No, Annie, no!" he said. "I don't care. Just skip it today."

She straightened. Her face set like a petrified apple.

"I do not skip my work, Mr. Paul Lawyer Baxter! Now stand aside with you and out of my way. I'll soon have your friend awake."

"No, Annie, no!" he pleaded. He stood his ground while she tried to press past him. "Let me get him awake anyway. Please—" he adopted the winning tone that was the only way to get around

old Annie, as he had learned. He even managed a smile. "Be a good girl, that's my girl, Annie, and come back later."

She sniffed and relaxed.

"I have but one more apartment to do on this floor," she said. "It I'll do first then. But in ten minutes I'll be back. Get your friend dressed and out of here." She turned toward the door but paused to call over her shoulder: "And I'll tolerate no nonsense, Mr. Paul. Today at one p.m. precisely my youngest nephew is being christened and it's not late I'll be being."

Then she was gone and the door shut. On legs that felt rubbery, Paul crossed and locked it, then leaned against it, looking dazedly around his tiny apartment for inspiration. Ten minutes! He had ten minutes. Then Annie would be back, and no matter how he protested she would go into the bedroom and discover the dead woman.

If he kept her out by force she would at once suspect that—as has happened in the past, though not to him—that he had a woman within and she would call for Dugan and the campus police. Annie's morality was rigid and not susceptible to the usual persuasion of a ten dollar bill.

As he leaned, breathing deeply, raggedly from the tension, hardly able to focus for the pain in his head, he saw across the

room the tiny alcove that held the miniature kitchenette, the door of the old-fashioned dumbwaiter, the little stove. Perhaps he could hide her behind the curtains. No, Annie, conscientious as ever, would clean there too.

His mind leaped backwards. The dumbwaiter! Relic from the days when the building had been erected a half century ago. It went down into the cellar where his car was stood in the garage-converted-basement and if—

He half ran toward the bedroom. He had nine minutes. He was opening the door when the telephone rang. He paused in an agony of indecision, letting it ring. Maybe he should not answer. But the shrill of the instrument drilled into his nerves and he snatched it up and barked into it, "Hello?"

"Well, aren't we in a foul mood today?" Susan's cool voice came over the wires. "Did you just get up, Paul darling?"

"Susan," he said. "Yes, I—I overslept."

"I'm not surprised." She laughed, a tinkly laughter that was not amused. "The class of Fifty-two was on the town last night, and I understand that rising young barrister, Paul Baxter, was not among the more sedate."

"I know," he said. He tried to sound humble, but it came out as impatience. "I—I guess I drank too much. Susan—"

"I thought you had sworn off, darling. After last year."

"I have now," he groaned. "Believe me, I have. For life."

"I'll try to keep father from hearing about it. But I hope you haven't forgotten we have a lunch date in twenty minutes?"

"I haven't forgotten." Wouldn't she ever stop talking? "Please, Susan, stall him. Give me an extra hour."

"I'll try." Her voice softened. "You only graduate once, after all, and as soon as we're married I'll see you don't drink and get into those blind tempers any more. But I did hear that last night at the Old Mill—"

"Please, Susan, I have to hurry," he said, forcing the words out in a desperate croak, and hung up. He just had time to hear her indignant "Well!" as the phone clicked down. Then he stumbled to the kitchen alcove, swung open the wooden door and began pulling up the old-fashioned dumbwaiter on which Annie sent down the trash and garbage to Charlie, the basement man.

It clattered up to the opening, a wooden box supported on half-inch rope. He wrenched at the shelf that cut it in half and it came loose. Then there was room—yes, room for a woman's body, doubled up, inside.

He half ran, half stumbled back to the bedroom, for he had only six minutes left and he was fearful

that Annie, might not even give him all of them. The dead woman was small but even so her hundred and ten pounds felt like a sack of sand in his arms. He staggered back with her, averting his gaze from the cold, still features so close to his own. The pale blue eyes continued to stare at nothing.

Baxter was forced to lay her down on the kitchenette table and double up her legs. Then, holding her awkwardly that way, he slid her into the dumbwaiter. Her feet protruded. He had to push them back in, and that reminded him he had forgotten the shoes, stockings and dress. But he could not bother with them now.

He forced her body inside the confines of the dumbwaiter, closed the door, and half ran, panting with the heat, back to the bedroom. He took the shoes and stockings and black dress, opened his closet, and jammed them inside a bag he had already partially packed, his hands shaking.

Time was running out on him, but he had to risk the extra minute to go into the bathroom, run the cold water tap, and splash cold water on his face and neck. He was patting himself dry and running a comb through his hair, contemplating the stubble on his chin, about which he could do nothing, when Annie rapped at the door.

He flung the towel into the tub, gave a last look around to make sure he had left no evidence in

sight, and ran to the door. He jerked it open.

"All right Annie, you can come —" he began, and stopped, breathing hard as if he had been running a long way.

A thin young man with a pale, oval face and eyes which heavy glasses magnified into the eyes of a goldfish in a bowl looked at him with surprise. It was Ruppert, the grind who lived in the next apartment.

"Oh, hello, Baxter," Ruppert said, his voice squeaky. It was always squeaky, but apparently Paul's appearance and manner had startled it into an octave higher. "Can I come in a minute?"

"Sorry, Ruppert," Paul said, trying to control his breathing. "I'm just going out."

He pushed past his neighbor and closed the door behind him. Ruppert put a protesting hand on his shoulder.

"But really, Baxter," he said. "It's nothing personal. I mean, I don't want to borrow any money or anything." His lips thinned. Apparently the rebuff months before when Paul had refused to lend him twenty dollars—the last time they had spoken—still rankled. "I was just coming across the campus and —But if you're in a hurry I'm sure it can wait."

"Yes, later, please, Ruppert," Paul said, and walked away, as swiftly as he could without seeming conspicuous, to the stairs. He



went down them, holding the rail for support, feeling Ruppert's eyes watching him until he was out of sight.

As soon as he passed the first floor without being seen by anyone else, and was safely down the turn that led him into the basement, he began running. He leaped the last two steps and ran down the long, echoing cement corridor that led to the main basement, now primarily a garage for graduate student cars, a storage room, and a depot for the trash Annie and Charlie between them collected.

As he came closer he heard a sound that made the blood drain from his face, and for a moment a paralyzing chill replaced the sense

of suffocation and heat. The sound was the squeaking of rope over pulley, the rattle of wood against wood, that told him someone was pulling down the dumbwaiter.

He came to the end of the corridor and pushed through the heavy metal door. Inside in the gloom, to his right, Charlie, the janitor, in stained overalls stood at the opening at the bottom of the dumbwaiter shaft and was leisurely pulling on the rope that brought the wooden box down.

"Charlie!" he yelled, so that the old man turned and looked at him in astonishment.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Paul," he said, without stopping the leisurely hand-over-hand motion. "If it's your car you're wanting I didn't get around to washing it today yet. Maybe later."

"The car doesn't matter," Paul said, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "But stop a minute, I want to talk to you."

"Why, sure." Obliging Charlie let go the rope and turned, just as the bottom of the dumbwaiter showed in the opening. "Say, what's on this dumbwaiter? I never knewed it to be so heavy."

"Forget the dumbwaiter!" Paul heard himself scream, and then as Charlie stared at him, he quickly forced a smile. "Sorry," he said, mopping his face on his coat sleeve. "I'm a little hungover this morning. We had a kind of party last night."

"Party, was it?" Charlie scoffed. "Ho haw, Mr. Paul, that was a party they'll talk about ten years from now. You young fellers—But what was it you wanted?"

"Why—" Paul fought to keep his voice normal—"I wanted to tell you I brought home a half empty bottle. It's up in my apartment. It's for you."

"Why, thanks, Mr. Paul." Charlie licked his lips in anticipation. "I'll go up and get it soon's I empty this dumbwaiter."

He turned back to the dumbwaiter rope, and found himself spun around as Paul grabbed his shoulder and almost flung him against the wall.

"Charlie, you don't understand!" Paul shrieked at him. "Annie is cleaning up, and if she finds the bottle she'll empty it down the sink!"

"That's different!" The janitor straightened himself, and grinned at Paul, winking. "No wonder you want me to hurry. I'll just hop up and get it, then in a couple of minutes I'll be able to get at your car."

On bandy legs he headed for the door, pushed through it, and started down the corridor. Paul Baxter waited until he was out of sight. Then, with fingers that felt wooden and stiff, he fought the nausea that threatened, and pulled the dumbwaiter down to the opening.

She, the nameless dead woman, was still there, doubled up in the

wooden box. Her head had flopped sideways and her open eyes stared at Paul—at him, through him, on toward nothingness.

He hesitated for a moment. His car was only twenty feet away—but it was an open convetible. Further on, the basement garage door was up, and the ramp that led to the street showed the afternoon sunlight streaming down, showed cars continually passing, showed the truncated lower halves of students, parents, townspeople walking. To think that he could put *her* into his car and hope to get her anyplace where he could hide her was madness. And yet he had to try. He had to—

The sight of the heavy iron door set into the opposite wall, half hidden by pipes, galvanized him into action. For a moment he felt dizzily exuberant. Beyond that door was a hiding place for *her*—the perfect hiding place: Once he got her there, he could stop worrying. And he could do it. He could!

He pulled the woman's body from the dumbwaiter and got it over his shoulder. Spurred on by the strength of hope, he crossed the big basement room, keeping out of sight behind the row of parked cars, and reached the iron door with the heavy handle. He leaned his weight on the handle and it gave, protestingly.

The door pulled open, slowly, reluctantly, until he could squeeze through, sideways, so that *her* head

and feet would not be caught against the door and the moulding. Then he was inside—within one arm of the maze of tunnels that criss-crossed the campus, carrying steam pipes and wires from the central power plant to all of the university building.

He pulled the door shut, manipulated the inside handle so that the outside handle went almost back into place—he could not force it the final inch.

Then for the moment he could do no more. He tried to lower the body to the cement floor of the tunnel, and the weight overbalanced him so that they fell together, against the asbestos-covered pipes, then to the floor, the woman underneath, Paul on top of her. Gaggling, he pulled himself away from her and lay, panting for breath, on the hot concrete, and listened.

He heard Charlie's voice, after a moment. Charlie must have been only a few feet from the tunnel door, calling.

"Mr. Paul! I can't find that bottle! Are you sure Annie didn't get it already?" A pause, then—"Mr. Paul? Now where the hell did he go? And what's the dumbwaiter doing empty? I was sure there was something on it."

Paul waited. Charlie did not try the tunnel door. His grumbling became fainter and ceased. He must have gone upstairs again. Paul discovered that unconsciously he had been holding his breath. Now he

let it out in a gasping sigh, and for a space of minutes just lay there, getting his breath back, waiting for his heart to ease its labored pounding.

At last he sat up. The tunnel he was in was six feet in height, and hardly more than three feet in width. Half the width was taken up by a triple tier of asbestos-wrapped pipes, leaving just enough room for a maintenance man to ease his way between pipes and wall.

His head still ached. But now it was the heat that was worst. Inside the tunnel, radiation from the steam pipes that ran machinery and heated water in the different buildings, even in summer, kept the temperature at an even hundred and ten degrees—once a scientifically-minded student had checked. Sweat rolled down him and his clothes were so soaked with it they rubbed his skin raw between his legs and under his arms.

The tunnel ran off into the distance—toward the center of the campus, actually—lit at ten yard intervals by a twenty-five watt bulb. He couldn't think—his mind was a helpless prisoner of his hangover and the heat now—but he knew what he had to do. He'd made up his mind the moment he saw the door and remembered the steam tunnels.

They were supposedly off-limits to students, and many in fact never knew of them. But a favorite initiation stunt was to take a blind-

folded freshman into them and leave him to find his way out by feel, and Paul himself had learned of them in this manner.

One thing all students who were familiar with them did know—where they connected with the women's dormitories the doors were kept securely locked. But the other buildings were left unlocked for the benefit of the workmen who made periodic checks of the pipes and connections.

The dead woman lay in a somehow obscene sprawl on the concrete floor. Paul picked her up, got her over his shoulders, and began to move down the tunnel.

At first her feet kept catching in the pipes. Finally he worked her into the position of a victim being rescued by a fireman's carry—a hold which secured her feet and one arm, and left him with one hand free to support himself against the wall.

Then he began his slow and painful progress. It was the progress of a man caught in a nightmare, and like a man asleep he lost track of the time. Dizziness came and went in waves. The heat attempted to beat him down. Pain reverberated in his head. But in time he came to a circular room where five tunnels radiated outward, each siphoning off its intestines of pipe. Huge valves connected the pipes, for shutting off power in case of a break.

Desperately he wanted to rest,

but did not dare. From memory he picked a side tunnel and started down it. He shuffled a hundred yards that might have been a hundred miles, and could feel only a dull triumph when he came to a door. Then, with his hand on the handle, he saw the dim white letters stenciled to the door: GYM. In an agony of disappointment he realized he had picked the wrong tunnel.

He turned and went back the interminable distance, selected the next tunnel, with no assurance it was the right one, and shuffled again down endless vistas of dimly lit corridor, breathing dryly through his mouth, his chest aching with each breath.

He had almost ceased to believe he would ever reach the end of his journey when abruptly the door was beside him. The right door this time. The one whose stencilled letters read: MED BLDG.

He leaned his weight against the door and pushed down on the iron handle. It gave, slowly, and the door swung open from his weight so abruptly he almost fell into the big, dim room beyond. But he caught himself, stepped through, and kicked the door shut without latching it, for he would have to return the same way. Then he looked around.

He knew where he was—the basement store room of the medical school building. There were crates around, open and unopened.

Two incomplete human skeletons, articulated, grinned at him from a corner. On a shelf a row of skulls returned the fleshless grins. Bones—a foot, a hand, two thigh bones, others he did not recognize nor care to—were strewn carelessly along other shelves. Big bottles of formaldehyde held objects which floated, dimly seen, and at which he refused to look closely.

For the moment, his almost total exhaustion lifted. He felt a renewal of strength, and a sense of inner triumph. He almost hurried across the room. Then at the last moment caution reasserted itself. He lowered the dead woman from his shoulder so that she lay hidden behind a crate. Then he opened the door into the room beyond a crack and peered out.

The big room with the rows of overhead drop lights under their reflectors was empty. His course in forensic medicine had taken him there briefly the year before; it was the dissecting room, and the dissecting carts, which were used to transport their human cargoes from the vats of preservative, were ranged against the wall.

He listened, and heard nothing. Quietly he slipped across the room and opened the door into the store room beyond. It was dark, and he turned on a single light. The old concrete vats—the building was fifty years old and should have been replaced a generation before—were covered. He strode to the

nearest and lifted the lid. Beneath him, obscured by the preserving fluid, they floated—the nameless ones from morgue and prison whose destiny had brought them here, rather than to the quiet darkness of a grave.

He hardly noted the rank odor of the formaldehyde, nor did he have any feeling that what he was looking at was real or had once been human. It was a dream now, a hideous nightmare which was almost ended. He could bring *her* in here, and remove the single slip she wore. Then lower her in with the others and replace the cover and go back to his room.

She would be found yes, but she would be a mystery. It might be days before she was found and then her presence might go forever unexplained. If he was lucky enough, she wouldn't even be identified. She might be assumed to be a clerical error—her arrival simply not properly noted. Anything could happen. At least, he would be free of her.

Exultant, he hurried back to the store room. He was stooping to lift *her* when he heard the footsteps coming into the dissecting room. His heart paused in his beating, and he straightened, pressed back against the wall.

The footsteps came toward the door of the storeroom, and a figure stepped through—a man who flicked on a switch which made the room blaze with light, giving a

pitiless illumination to all the odds and ends in the room—the grinning skeletons, the eternally amused skulls, the floating organs in their bottles, the oddments of bones, the broken dissecting tables, the scattered packing cases. And to Paul's white, sweat-drenched features.

It was Jensen, the medical school's janitor, a lean and scraggly man with a missing front tooth, who faced Paul Baxter now with a goatish grin.

"Ha! Got you!" he said. "Come on out, young man. No good to hide now."

Paul remained where he was, his mouth open, drawing in deep, shuddering breaths. Jensen stepped forward until he was close enough to see the dead woman lying doubled up on the floor. He stared down at her, then back at Paul, his thin lips curling.

"So," he said. "You thought you could put something over on old Jensen, eh? You college kids! You're all alike."

He made a face.

"I've handled a thousand of you. You're Baxter, aren't you? I remember you. So, what you think you're doing here? Bringing one in, hey? And I thought you were up to the old trick, the one they tried first time back the year the school was built, stealing a body."

"Yes," Paul said, his lips and tongue dry. "I was—bringing her in. I thought—I thought she might

not be noticed. In with the others."

"Not be noticed!" Jensen snorted. "As if Jensen wouldn't notice! Jensen notices everything around here. Now what you think I do with you, huh?"

"Call the police," Paul said dully. "Let's get it over with."

"Call the police?" Jensen cocked a speculative eye at him. "Maybe yes. Maybe in a minute I call Duggan, head of the campus police. Or-maybe I don't have to call him."

"Not call him?" Paul stared at him stupidly. "What do you mean?"

"Well—" Jensen's face twisted with a grimace that was meant to be an elaborate wink—"don't have to anybody know about this except you and me."

"You mean—" Paul licked his lips. "You mean you might cover up for me?"

"Maybe," Jensen snickered. "If I was persuaded right. You know." He made a rubbing motion of his thumb against the first two fingers.

"How much?" Paul asked. "How much would you want?"

"Oh—" Jensen pursed his lips and looked at him sideways. "Say seventy-five dollars. Not too much, believe me."

"Seventy-five dollars?" Paul asked. "You'd help me cover up a murder for seventy-five dollars?"

"Murder?" Jensen scowled at him. "Who say anything about murder? Last night you steal Num-



ber Eighty-seven, just come in from County Morgue, unidentified victim of a strangling. Before I get around to putting her away safe. Today you bring her back. So maybe I not say anything, if you persuade me right. Why get a nice boy like you in trouble, hey?"

"Number Eighty-seven?" Paul choked. "She—came from here last night? A new body for the dissecting class?"

"That's what I said," the janitor growled. "You crazy kids, stealing dead bodies. You think it's funny. Well, you cause me plenty trouble. Now what you want to do? Have me call Duggan or just keep this between us, huh?"

"A joke!" Paul said. "One of the oldest jokes in medical school—to plant a cadaver on someone!"

Suddenly it was so monstrously funny that laughter welled up in him uncontrollably. Those medics

who had joined the party—they must have been they. They had seen how tight he was and decided to have some fun with him. Maybe they had helped him home and when he passed out, quietly slipped No. Eighty-seven into his bed, with the clothing they had bought to give her the appearance of a woman newly murdered.

"Baxter!" Jensen said sharply. "Stop that laughing! Stop it, you hear me?"

But he could not stop. Too serious, they had always called him. Well, he could see the joke now. He kept on laughing, even after Jensen slapped him and he fell to the floor. Lying on the floor, he laughed and laughed, until Jensen left him there and went to the telephone.

Ten Years Later.

1964

"YOU SEE HOW funny it was?" Paul Baxter asked, and throwing back his head, guffawed deeply. He had put on weight. Where he had been tense and underweight as a student, now he was plump, his features smooth and pink with easy living. Squeezed into one side of a booth at The Hut, which had been a tradition for ten generations of students, he beamed at Steve and Bert.

They smiled back at him, a little tentatively! Ten years had changed them less than he, and in the or-

ange and black blazers and caps which the Class of '54, Medicine, had chosen as its costume for the big tenth reunion, they still looked almost boyish. Most of the grads crowded into The Hut wore some kind of reunion garb—orange and black, or blue and white blazers, loud-checked jackets, even a few imitation Bavarian costumes. But Paul wore only a gray suit, with a white shirt and gray tie—certainly nothing expensive, even though sedately respectable.

Now Paul Baxter leaned toward them, his pink features suddenly sober.

"Of course," he said, "if I hadn't been so hungover I might have suspected something. But one thing it did for me, that gag. Taught me to lay off the booze. Why, I haven't had a drink for ten years. Until today, that is. I guess a man can take a couple when he meets his old friends at their tenth reunion."

He signaled a waitress, squeezing through the press.

"Three more!" he called, and she took the empty glasses from in front of them and disappeared.

"But to think you passed right by and didn't say anything," he added reproachfully, to Steven and Bert, opposite him. "I had to chase after you. Was I surprised! But I'd forgotten it was reunion day, and you never wrote me to tell me you were coming."

His pink, baby-plump features mirrored indignation now. "Was

that any way to treat a friend?" he asked. "Not writing? For ten years?"

Steve Jennings glanced sideways at Bert Forrest, and swallowed. "It was like this, Paul," he said. "We knew you had our address in California and—well, we thought you were mad at us."

"We didn't know you hadn't got our message," Bert added hastily. "I mean, after we left your building, we met Ruppert on the campus and wrote out a note for him to give you telling you it was just a gag. Only of course he didn't deliver it to you."

"And we telephoned too, before we took a cab to the airport," Steve added. "But you didn't answer. So we figured you'd gone out—and had everything under control."

Paul's lips shaped themselves into a comic 'O' of surprise. "You?" he said. "My best friends? You put her in my room?"

Steve nodded. "After you got stinko," he said, "a gang of those medics told us about having her in their station wagon and we—well, you tell him, Bert."

"We figured we'd give you a big shock," Bert said. "When you woke up, that is. We were trying to—well, do you a favor. We thought you'd be so shocked you'd never take another drink. It was a gag but we meant it to be—kind of helpful."

"And—" he added, as Paul

stared at him "—you see, it worked. You didn't take another drink, you just said so. We knew the only thing that could keep you from being a brilliant success was that tendency to go wild when you had a few drinks, and we figured a really good shock—

"Of course, we planned to get there earlier, to wake you up and sort of find her, and then when you'd had time to sweat, spill the gag. But we slept late too. Anyway, it worked out okay and we're certainly glad to see you looking so well."

For a moment longer Paul Baxter stared at them. Then he leaned back and roared with laughter until everyone in The Hut turned to look.

"My best friends!" he choked, between spasms of mirth. "My best friends. Why, God damn you to hell, I'm going to kill you both!"

And still screaming with laughter, he lunged across the narrow table, pinned them in place with his bulk, and was smashing their heads together, trying to crack their skulls open, when a dozen hands dragged him off and subdued him.

But even then he continued to laugh. Even when the men with the ambulance came and took him away, he was still laughing.

"I'm so sorry," the plump, middle-aged nurse who introduced herself as Nurse Roberts apologized after he was gone. "It's all

my fault for taking my eyes off him. But he's never been violent before, always perfectly tractable and people would certainly think he was quite normal except when he was having a laughing fit.

"So I take him shopping with me and it pleases him to carry the packages. But today in the crowd I lost him. It's the first time in ten years it's happened. But I suppose it means he'll have to stay in confinement after this."

She sighed, then looked concerned. "Really, wouldn't you two like to come to the hospital to be checked over to make sure he didn't hurt you. I'm afraid he was trying hard enough to."

"No thank you, Nurse Roberts," Steve Jennings said. "We, well—"

"We have to catch a plane back to the Coast," Bert Forrest put in. "Come on, Steve, if we hurry we can just make it."

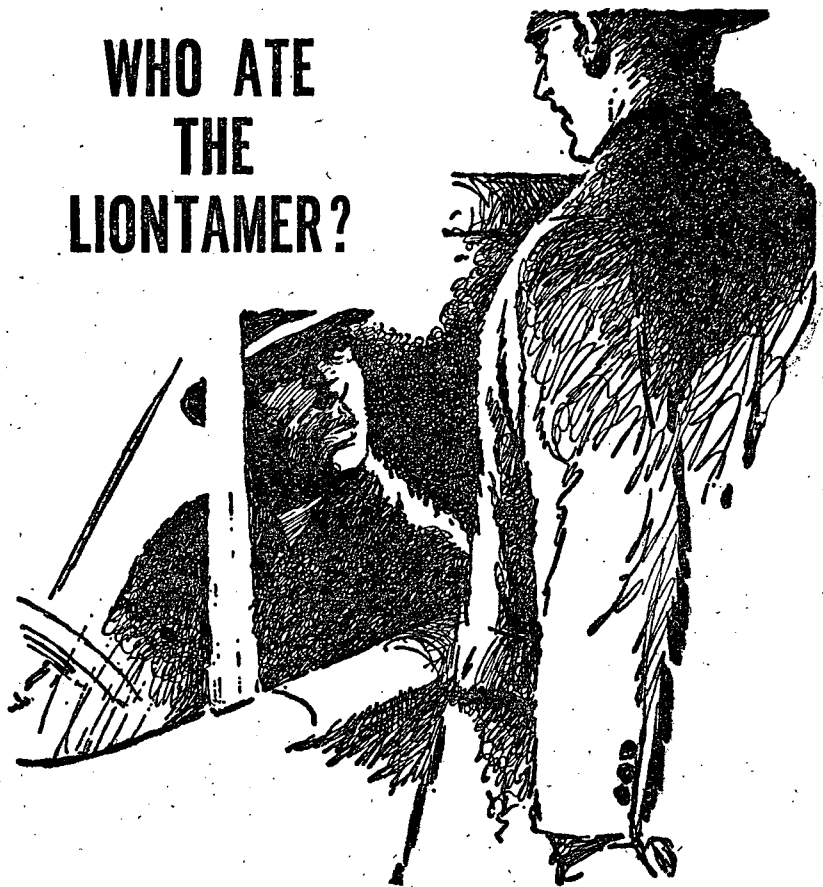


IMPORTANT PRICE CHANGE ANNOUNCEMENT

Commencing with this issue the newsstand price of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE goes to fifty cents, adding more pages and more reading time.

Magazine production costs are high everywhere in the country and are steadily mounting. To lessen these costs by lowering the high standard of mystery story excellence which MSMM has always maintained in bringing to its readers only the best stories by the finest writers would have been unthinkable. And as we have now added sixteen pages to the magazine to increase your reading enjoyment we are making a slight price change that will subordinate the production cost factor to an aim that cannot be subordinated—that of making the MSMM an outstanding magazine in the field of mystery fiction.

WHO ATE THE LIONTAMER?



By **RON GOULART**

If a liontamer is brutally slain . . . it's only natural to eye the big cats with suspicion.

THE MORTUARY organist had a cold and kept sneezing between the chords. Even in the harshly-lit back room you could hear him. Gene Snow was standing wide-legged a few feet from the dead man.

"That's a great tune," he said.

Lieutenant Hagopian of the San Amaro police said, "After the next election we may get our own morgue."

"That'll be nice for you." Snow was a tall tanned man in his early thirties. His hair was thinning and he kept it close cut. On his left cheek, near the ear, he had a thin white scar. Stepping closer to the body he said, "Well, so much for this job."

The short wide Hagopian tapped the corpse's naked shoulder. "Some client hire you to find this guy?"

Snow shook his head. "I knew where he was supposed to be," he said. "I had some money to deliver to him."

"Your client couldn't have lured Mr. Brecker down to the beach and shot him?" asked Hagopian, dropping his hands into the loose pockets of his black suit coat.

"Nope," said Snow. "My client hired me this morning at ten. According to you, that's about the time Brecker got killed."

Hagopian nodded. He studied the dead man for a few seconds and then covered the body up. "You in a hurry to get back to Hollywood? Got time for a drink?"

Snow grinned. "Sure. But I don't want to get involved in this."

"There's a bar a few blocks from here that's pretty quiet."

"No music?"

"No music, no sneezing."

EXCEPT FOR THE bartender's cough the place was quiet. It was

hardly eight o'clock is the evening. The afterwork drinkers had left, and the later set hadn't wandered in yet.

"Since he seems to have been standing near the edge of the hummock when he was shot," said Hagopian, rattling the ice in his Scotch, "the bullet apparently went right through him and into the ocean. We haven't found it. Brecker was shot from several feet away—just once. He died probably about ten or fifteen minutes after he was hit.

"That's a deserted stretch of beach down by the old part of town. It's deserted in the daytime anyway. At night a lot of the motorcycle elite use it for a trysting place. Which means there are quite a lot of footprints, cigarette butts and assorted other things that might be clues scattered around the site."

"Was Brecker still alive when he was found?" Snow asked, digging his cigarettes out of his inside pocket and dropping the pack on the booth table.

"Yeah," said Hagopian. "That's another nice angle. No witnesses have turned up. But we had a possible break in that one of our patrolmen, a kid named Bill Yewton, cruises that beat in a patrol car. He found Brecker there while Brecker was still alive."

"I always like deathbed confessions," Snow said wryly. "Even outdoor ones. What did Brecker manage to say? Anything at all?"

"Sure," said Hagopian, reaching across the table and shaking a cigarette out of Snow's pack. "Venus."

Snow rubbed at the thin scar on his cheek. "Venus. That's all?"

"The entire thing as witnessed by Yewton," said Hagopian, shrugging. "Maybe some girl named Venus shot him."

"And then went back into the sea."

"Or maybe he was rubbed out by saucermen from Venus because he knew too much about their invasion plans. Or maybe the killer didn't have any arms and this was Brecker's clever way of telling us."

"What about suspects?"

"We're working on that. Nobody named Venus, though." Hagopian remembered to light the cigarette he'd taken. "Now what do you know about the guy?"

"Well," said Snow, "I'll give you a possible angle. Lloyd Brecker used to be, among other things, a blackmailer."

Hagopian sat up. "That is an angle. Did you arrive at that conclusion by looking at the calluses on his fingers?"

"My client told me," said Snow.

"A woman?"

"Yes. She used to know Brecker four or five years ago. He was a reporter for one of the keyhole sort of papers in Hollywood. Then he moved up to one of the legit, if there is such a thing in LA daily papers. On the side Brecker ran a

small-scale blackmail business. He put the bite on a scattering of people he'd learned things about on his reporter's rounds."

"I thought all newspapermen were nice guys like Hildy Johnson. What did Brecker have on your client?"

"Nothing originally," said Snow, finally lighting a cigarette himself. "They were more or less romantic. He told her something of his setup and she drifted away from him. Then a few days ago she got a call and he told her about some of her letters he had."

"It was a bargain blackmail deal. A thousand bucks for all the letters. She's married now and figured it was worth the money to get rid of him. She gave me the thousand and told me to come down here and buy the stuff from Brecker."

Hagopian shook his head. "An attitude like that merely encourages crime." He took another cigarette.

"Sure," said Snow.

Hagopian leaned back against the dark leather of the booth seat. "Now if I were to come to you and say somebody had just eaten the liontamer at the circus—who would you think of right off as suspects?"

"The lions."

"So if a blackmailer gets killed you look for the people he's been blackmailing."

"Logical," said Snow. "Except I thought Brecker was almost straight now. Doing these 'as-told-to' biographies."

"That's why he's been living in San Amaro, doing a whitewash job on our mayor, Joel Krigman."

"For a book?"

"Hardcover, New York publisher."

"Krigman can't be thinking of running for governor?"

Hagopian spread his hands wide and tilted his head. "Don't know."

Snow's Scotch on the rocks had turned to a glass of pale brown water. He drank it down anyway. "I'll let you get on the track of blackmail victims. Maybe tomorrow I can get a case that'll be good for more than a day's work."

"This woman who hired you is in the clear for sure?"

"Unless she hired somebody to do the killing," said Snow. "It doesn't seem likely over a batch of love letters. I think she's trustworthy."

"Come to work for us and I'll throw away the polygraph. How are you at dowsing?"

"She looked honest. Nine years in this damn business gives me the right to say somebody's honest now and then." Snow slid up out of the booth.

"You driving back to Hollywood tonight then?"

"Right," said Snow. "I was hired to go to Brecker's place. I did. One of your boys was there and he sent me down to see you. I did that, too. Now I'm square with my client and with the law. Okay?"

"Any more angles you think of, let me know," said Hagopian, following him to the door.

Hagopian drove Snow back to his car, which was parked in front of the mortuary. Snow sat in the dark car for a few minutes. The organ was still going inside the chapel. "Who ate the liontamer?" he said to himself. Turning on the ignition, he drove off.

Gene Snow decided to leave town by the same route he had taken coming in. That meant passing again by the apartment house where Lloyd Brecker had lived. Vaguely, in some poorly lit section of his mind, Snow was aware of something bothering him.

A block beyond the square pink stucco apartment house it was obvious. Snow pulled over to the curb. As he moved from Brecker's block toward the edge of town everything began to slide down the social scale. This block was only half run down.

Directly opposite the spot where Snow was getting out of his car now there was a business that had already closed. The high iron-work fence around it was broken and askew. The rows of dusty statues that led back to the dark office were surrounded by high brittle weeds.

Snow had seen the place driving to Brecker's earlier. A defunct stone cutter. Snow decided to look around. It should be a good place to find a Venus.

Once through a break in the



fence Snow unbuttoned his coat, so he could grab his short-barreled .38 revolver quickly if he had to. Just inside the fence was a stack of tombstones. The name on the top one was Brown.

"That's what comes of working on spec," Snow thought, moving toward the nearest row of statues.

It was an overcast night and Snow had to stop close to each statue to recognize it. There were three Moseses, a whole row of long-

robed winged angels. Snow felt like Thomas Wolfe on a visit home.

Near the fallen-in shack that had been the office he spotted a Venus. This one had arms but on her pedestal Venus was carved in six-inch-high letters. Glancing at the street, Snow dropped to his knees. Behind the statue was a foot square patch of ground that was weedless and fresh looking. In a selection of clutter behind the shed he found a trowel. He carefully started digging behind the Venus.

Less than a foot below ground the point of the trowel clacked against metal. "Law me, Mr. Sutter, I think you've found something," Snow muttered, digging out a small strong box.

Sitting back on his haunches Snow rattled the box. It sounded full of papers. The lock shouldn't be hard to pick. When Snow poked at it with his finger the box popped open.

This seemed to be Lloyd Brecker's blackmail kit. There was the packet of letters from Snow's client. Underneath them an assortment of stuff concerning several other people, most of whom Snow had never heard of. At the bottom of the box was a clean copy of a mug shot.

Even in the dim light Snow recognized the man with the number hanging around his neck a little off center. It was Joel Krigman as he had looked some twenty years before. In researching for his biography of the mayor Brecker must

have found some pretty good material. To a blackmail buff like Brecker this picture would be a strong temptation.

Snow looked toward the street again. The farthest Moses, was flickering. Then the closer one. Finally the third. Snow stuck the packet of letters his client had written to Brecker in his inside coat pocket and stood up. Someone with a flashlight was coming toward him.

Snow shifted the strongbox over to his left hand and elbowed his left arm back. His coat swung open and he edged his right hand toward the revolver at his belt.

"There's a lot of spare tombstones here, mister," said a voice behind him. "You'll get your name on one if you go for a gun."

"I was just stretching," said Snow apologetically, not turning. The guy with the flashlight was a few yards away now. "For a bankrupt business this place has a pretty brisk trade."

"Hell," said the man with the flashlight.

Snow's shoulders relaxed. "You got to thinking about Venus, too."

Lieutenant Hagopian dropped the beam of his flashlight. Around Snow he said, "It's okay, Bill. This is a friend of mine from Hollywood."

Snow handed the strong box to Hagopian. "With a little luck and the stuff in here you could start a good blackmail racket."

The man who had been behind Snow joined them. "We were right, huh, lieutenant?"

"Gene Snow," said Hagopian, "this is Bill Yewton."

"You're the one who found Brecker?"

Yewton was a big wide man, not yet thirty. His hair was almost white blond and he wore it cropped close. "Yeah. I kept running over in my mind what the guy had said before he died. I thought about his address, this neighborhood. I grew up near here and I remembered these stone works. I figured there should be at least one Venus here and maybe Brecker had hidden something important near it."

"Yewton came in and told me about this place," said Hagopian, starting to shuffle through the papers in the box. "Seemed worth checking out."

"Don't miss that bottom exhibit," said Snow. "It makes for a swell motive."

Hagopian found the picture of the mayor. He studied it silently for a moment, then whistled softly in startlement.

"If anybody wants to sit on that, remember I've had a look at it," said Snow.

"What is it?" asked Yewton.

Hagopian put the mug shot on top of the rest of the material and closed the box. "I better talk to a couple of people before I tell you."

Snow frowned. "You know," he said, "with something like that in

his files, why did Brecker bother my client for a little quick cash?"

"Insatiable greed maybe," said Hagopian.

To Yewton Snow said, "Any good motels in your old neighborhood here?"

"*Right Off The Road* three blocks down toward the highway is okay," said Yewton. "Free TV and a heated pool."

"Not going back to Hollywood?" asked Hagopian, tucking the strong box under his arm.

"I'll wait until tomorrow when the light's better," said Snow.

Single file they walked down the aisles of statues to the street.

THE SOUND OF someone falling flat into the heated pool awoke Snow. Bluejays were dancing on his sunlit window sill and the little speaker over his bed was playing Romberg music. Snow rubbed his eyes.

"Any day that starts off this idyllic is bound to end up bad," he muttered.

He swung out of bed and wandered around the room looking for his wristwatch. It was on top of the portable TV set. The watch face said that it was nine A.M.

He called the coffee shop and they brought him breakfast while he was shaving and showering. Snow finished his second cup of lukewarm coffee at ten on the nose.

Outside a tall brunette in a one-piece gold suit poised on the edge

of the lowboard. The board thwacked and she knifed toward the water as Snow passed. She hit with a flat smack.

As Snow got into his car there was another slap of water.

There were no bluejays downtown but things were still running too smoothly for Snow. Statistically one bank official out of two should be surly. But in San Amaro's business district the first half dozen banks he went to treated him as though he were a leprechaun with an inside tip on where to dig for a pot of gold.

He found an account for Lloyd Brecker at the sixth bank he tried. Brecker had deposited five hundred dollars a little over a month before. That was about the time he'd arrived in San Amaro. He'd made a fifty dollar withdrawal three weeks ago. The day before he was killed he'd taken out the rest of the four hundred and fifty.

Snow couldn't locate any other accounts for Brecker at the remaining five downtown banks. A black-mailer wasn't above having an account under a fake name. Still, it was funny that he had withdrawn all the money at once. Maybe somebody was blackmailing him. He had nearly five hundred in cash and he'd tried to get another thousand out of the woman who'd hired Snow.

Snow had called his client late the night before and told her what had happened. This morning he'd mailed the letters off to her. She had

said she knew nothing at all about Brecker's death, and he was convinced that she had not been lying.

Snow sat in the square above the downtown parking center and watched the pigeons dance on the hat of General Sherman, who was shaking hands with a marble woman who seemed to be both Columbia and the Spirit of Civic Virtue.

Snow lit a cigarette and turned his attention to two slim secretaries who were cutting across the square for either an early lunch, or a late coffee break.

What would Brecker have done with the money he took from his account? He didn't have it on him when he was found dead. Snow remembered Lieutenant Hagopian saying Brecker had only twenty bucks in cash in his wallet. Somebody could have robbed him. Or maybe he just had a high rent and grocery bills to take care of.

"So why'd he want the other thousand?" mumbled Snow. Snow took a deep breath and stood up. "To get out of town maybe."

The day was getting gradually warmer. Snow decided to check the travel agencies and the ticket offices. In Rudolpho De Romano's Travel Service he found a girl clerk who'd waited on Lloyd Brecker the day before he'd been shot.

"It's ironic, isn't it?" the girl said, smiling at Snow. She had a dark shade of purple eye makeup on and when she blinked her eyes turned into big round black dots. It

made her look like a negative Orphan Annie. "Alive one day, dead the next."

"Well," said Snow, smiling back at her, "that's life. You sold Lloyd Brecker a ticket?"

"Two tickets," the girl corrected. "To leave from Burbank next Monday."

"And where to?"

"Mexico City," she said, pointing with one white bloused shoulder at the travel poster of Mexico on the far wall. "We made a hotel reservation, too."

"How many rooms?"

Her head lowered. "One double."

"He was traveling with a woman then?"

"I think so," the girl said. "I assumed so. But I don't know who the lady was. Mr. Brecker came in alone."

"Thanks."

"Anyplace you'd care to go?" the girl said as Snow walked to the door.

"Right now I want to go to Police Headquarters," said Snow. "But any day now I may want to head for Mexico, too."

"It's lovely this time of year."

It was almost two PM. Snow loosened his collar a little. The sidewalks were dry and hot, the street was gummy. He worked himself into a lane of shade along the building side of the pavement and headed for Lieutenant Hagopian. By now maybe something had turned up on

Brecker's victims. Particularly on Mayor Joel Krigman.

LIEUTENANT HAGOPIAN was leaning forward at his desk, eating a corn beef sandwich. "Would you like some dill pickles?" he asked Snow.

"No, thanks, I just put one out." He sat in one of the school-type wooden chairs near the desk. "So?"

"They always put one in with the corn beef sandwiches." He held the pickle up to Snow.

"Fine. Can you fill me in on anything?"

Hagopian finished the sandwich. "I talked to people."

"That's coming out of your shell."

The lieutenant slid open a desk drawer. He tossed a slim magazine down on the desk. "First off, about the mayor. Look at this."

The magazine was called the CALIFORNIA EXPOSE MONTHLY. On the cover was the mug shot of Joel Krigman. *Will Our Next Governor Be An Ex-Con?* was printed in boldface over the blowup of the photo.

"This came out last year by the date on it," said Snow.

"Yeah," said Hagopian. "Krigman was booked in the early forties on a minor charge up in Oakland. At the trial he was let off. This isn't much of a secret apparently. That magazine doesn't have a large circulation but it's read up and down the state."

"Then Krigman wouldn't knock off somebody to get it," said Snow.

"Especially since he isn't going to try for Governor."

"You picked an odd time to kid around, Lieutenant."

"No, it's true. Nobody outside of the family and his close associates know it yet. He had a mild heart attack last week and he's been advised not to undertake a campaign this time."

Snow rolled the magazine up and slapped his knee with it. "That cancels him. Brecker must have had the picture in his files, so he could whitewash the charge in the biography."

"That's some filing system he had," said Hagopian.

"What about the rest of the people that there was material on in the box?"

"All told there was stuff concerning nine people," said the lieutenant. "The mayor and a fellow in the wholesale jewelry business are the only ones who live in this area. The mayor's out and the jeweler has an alibi. I've got a man up in LA checking around there. Hope we don't upset your client."

Snow shook his head. He unrolled the magazine and dropped it on the desk blotter. "Maybe you ought to try and find out why Brecker was leaving town next week."

Putting the magazine away, Hagopian said, "That's what he wanted money for, huh? I thought

you'd work on that angle, so I haven't gotten around to it yet. What did you find out?"

Snow told him.

"Good," said Hagopian. "Gives me a chance to say—find the woman."

"Well," said Snow. He rose.

"Going back to Hollywood now?"

"No, it's too hot to drive. I think I'll go back and jump in my heated pool."

"I'll give you a call tonight maybe," said Hagopian. "Sure you don't want this pickle?"

"Nope," said Snow. He went downstairs to the nearest delicatessen and had two corn beef sandwiches.

Back at the motel Snow swam around underneath for awhile. He took a shower. He sat in the hollow sounding sofa chair by his bed and smoked cigarettes. Finding the knob that controlled the free music Snow turned it up. With his eyes almost closed he talked to himself.

"Suppose all the people that Brecker seems to have had stuff against turn out to have alibis. There's something phoney about about that box anyway. Brecker must have known the picture of the mayor wasn't worth anything."

Snow paced.

"But if somebody wanted to gather up enough documents to make it look like Brecker was killed because of his blackmailing activities? Sure, they could have gone

through his place and gathered together whatever papers and such that looked like blackmail material. Brecker had saved some of his old blackmail souvenirs."

Back in the chair Snow lit a cigarette.

"So somebody knows Brecker used to be a blackmailer. They want it to look like he was killed because of it. But this guy went too far in making us look for lions."

Snow got up and started getting dressed.

"And since Brecker's last words led up to the buried box that means only one of two things. Brecker was in on the plot to throw the police off the trail of his killer. Or the last words were nothing like what was reported."

Dressed, Snow tucked his revolver in his belt.

"Let's find out about the famous last words of Lloyd Brecker."

The address the phone book listed for Bill Yewton was easy enough to find. His apartment building was a fairly new one and it had its address on its light orange frontside in black numbers two feet high. Colored lights were arranged around the narrow front lawn and all along the driveway that led to the car ports in back of the three-story building.

Snow found the Yewton apartment on the ground floor, facing the driveway. The lights here made the door look an intense hot yellow. Snow knocked gingerly.

After a full minute the door opened as far as its gold chain would allow. "Yes?" asked the woman who had opened the door. She was a tall pretty blonde. The lines of her cheekbones and the hollows under her eyes were a smoky black.

"Mrs. Yewton, I'd like to talk to your husband."

"Bill's out," the woman said.

"On duty?"

"No. He went out."

"My name is Gene Snow. I'm a private investigator from Hollywood. Maybe your husband mentioned meeting me."

"Yes."

"Do you have any idea when he'll be back?"

The woman shook her head. "He wasn't sure himself."

"Were you going to Mexico with Lloyd Brecker?"

The girl's face didn't change. But her head ticked once very slightly. "No." She quietly closed the door.

Snow took a step back. He looked toward the parking lot. He found a '60 Chevy there with Yewton's registration on the steering column. Maybe he was out for a walk.

"Snow," a voice said behind him.

"Yewton," Snow said, turning.

The big patrolman grinned. He was wearing a dark blue coat sweater and the handle of a revolver showed at the third button from the bottom. "Why'd you ask my wife that?"

"So you weren't out."

"I saw you coming through the window. I figured you might say something to Shirley about what you wanted. You did."

"She know Lloyd Brecker before or did he pick her up since he got here?"

"From before. She used to work on a paper in LA."

"How'd you know he used to be a blackmailer?"

"I made Shirley tell me all about him when I found out she was seeing him again. Then I did some checking on my own." Yewton shook his head. "I thought Shirley was talked out of the whole business. Then she told me she was going to leave with the guy."

"You didn't find out enough," said Snow. "The stuff you put in the box wasn't quite right. Brecker had been fairly clean for the past few years. But when the mayor decided not to run for governor he probably turned thumbs down on the book Brecker was to do. That meant there wasn't going to be as much dough as he'd thought. So he did go back into blackmail. If you'd got something on him you could have put him out of the way legally."

"A guy like that I wanted out of the picture completely."

"How'd you get him to come down to the beach?"

"I'd swiped that blackmail stuff the night before while he was out. I told him I wanted to talk to him about it. He came."

"So now?"

"That's what I've been wondering," said Yewton. "They say that sometimes a murder you think up on the spur of the moment is more likely to go undetected."

"A spontaneous killing can be hard to solve."

"Something in your car maybe. A fake accident."

"Sounds good." Snow looked up at the back of the building a few feet away. There were several lighted windows showing.

Bracing himself for a dive Snow yelled, "Come on, Yewton, let's get that bottle before the store closes. Come on."

"Damn you," whispered Yewton.

Snow started singing the *Maine Stein Song* and edging away from Yewton. "Yes, there are two neighbors looking out already." Snow was standing in the glare of a green floodlight now. "They're getting a good look at me."

Yewton's whole body jerked and he started to shake. "Damn you, you've fouled up everything."

Snow dived sideways on the gravel and ducked behind a big solid old Buick. Yewton's first shot scattered gravel three feet from where Snow had landed.

Yewton shouted. "You've spoiled it all." He came for Snow, firing.

Snow waited. He squeezed the trigger of his .38 and got Yewton in the leg. Yewton fell. Snow jumped up and his heel smashed the gun out of Yewton's sprawling hand. To be on the safe side he clipped Yewton on the jaw with his gun and knocked him out.

From over near a row of garbage cans a door opened. A fifty year old woman in a flowered dress stood there with her hands on her hips.

"Are you going to stop this. I've called your superiors and they're going to come over and take a hand, Mr. Yewton. A policeman acting like this. It's terrible."

She went back inside, slamming the door.

Snow leaned back against the Buick until he heard the sound of sirens.

Next Month—A NEW PHIL EGAN THRILLER

HIS NUMBER CAME OUT DEATH

By ALSON J. SMITH



**THE
PRACTICALLY
PERFECT
CRIME**

**by
MORRIS
HERSHMAN**

*A burglar who works
alone can ill-afford
... family trouble.*

I ALWAYS FIGURED I'd been doing all right as my own boss and only worker on hundreds of deals. For years now I'd been pulling profitable and quiet one-man holdups all over the city. I never had to worry about splitting the loot or about stoolpigeons or about

much of anything else till my wife decided to become a partner in the business.

There's at least one odd thing about a woman: she always goes after her man to improve what's perfect. Let her cram one idea into that little square head of hers and

it won't be pushed out with anything short of guided missiles.

My wife turned to me one evening when the two of us were sitting together in the living room. "Are you going to do the next caper all by yourself?" she asked.

"I never yet went with a brass band," I told her.

"Maybe you need help, though," Marge said easily. "I don't mean for you to pay somebody, but you might use some help from me. When the kids were younger I couldn't do anything, but now—well, you know an ideal marriage works when a wife helps her husband in every possible way. Everybody who writes about marriage says that."

"Somehow, Marge, I don't think those people have got us in mind," I said.

"Sharing," she said, as she turned on the T.V. to my favorite Western, which she couldn't stomach but always watched with me, "is the biggest thing in marriage."

"Not for me." We'd had our fights because she used to want me to help her do the laundry and wash the dishes. But I used to tell her that if she'd go out and do my jobs for me I'd make sure that she had a pretty comfortable home to stay in. We were together when it came to fighting, I'll say that much.

"You never tell me your business problems," she said now, feeling in a cuddly mood, I guess. "You never tell me what's worry-

ing you, Tom. Other women's husbands talk to them."

"My business is a little different."

"But you talk in your sleep," she said, leaning forward. "So I know that you're worrying about Galway's, the clock manufacturer. You can't get the details of their payroll and you need help."

"I need information," I said. "But I'll find a way—"

"I didn't want to say it till now, Tom, but I decided to help you," she said, cutting me short. "I went down to Galway's and applied for a job there. Of course I'm a little rusty nowadays, but they let me ask some questions while I filled out an application."

"Oh." I was a little shaken up, but I remembered that Marge used to work as a bookkeeper. We met, as a matter of fact, because she identified me on a show-up line as having pulled a job at the place where she worked at that time. But I never carried a grudge because I beat that rap and we started dating. Many a time we laugh about it, these days.

"I've got the information," Marge said, smiling. "Payday is on Thursday at three o'clock exactly, and the firm always pays in cash."

"I'd rather have found it out on my own," I told her.

"Don't be in a hurry to thank me," she said a little nastily. "I take it you'll be holding them up next Thursday, won't you, Tom?"

I shrugged. She'd know soon enough that I'd be doing the job then. But I didn't want to say so.

"I'm glad to help, even though you're not grateful for it," she said. "If I could do that much, I can do more and you know it. All I want is the chance."

"I'd rather get help from one of the kids," I said, and stomped out of the room in the middle of my favorite Western.

If I had been just a little smarter, I'd have noticed that Marge was looking thoughtful; and I would have asked myself why. That might have spoiled my sleep between then and Thursday, of course.

Just an hour and a half before the big action was scheduled to start, I went into the kitchen to say so long to Marge. She was there all right, wearing a house dress, apron and slippers. She was making sandwiches, mostly out of ham and lettuce on rye. Only the kids went for that kind of sandwich, but they were supposed to be out of the house.

"I thought the kids are in day camp," I said, staring down at the breadbox.

"Well, yes," Marge was a little nervous. "But if you're out for a long time today, you might get hungry."

"That's for me? Do you think I'd take sandwiches to a robbery?"

"Half a dozen, just in case."

"No coffee?" I was being sarcastic, but the edge in my voice was lost on her.

"In a thermos bottle, dear," she said calmly. "And one thermos with milk, depending on which you'd rather have at the time."

"Don't forget the picnic basket," I said when I'd got my breath back. "I know, I know. You're just trying to help."

She was pretty unpleasant later on insisting that I put on my best dark suit ("You should be ashamed to be seen on the street in those so-called sports clothes of yours.") and my best black shoes. When I was finished, instead of letting her look me over I went straight out to the car. She was at the wheel.

"Get away from there and go into the house," I said angrily. "What's come over you this morning?"

"I'm driving you," she said. "You always say you're very nervous when it comes to making a getaway, and this way you'll be able to relax while your wife helps by driving."

"No."

"You've got to use this car, Tom, and I won't get out of it till the job is done," she said stubbornly. "I'm going to be a good wife and help my husband whether he likes it or not. Well? Are you coming in or aren't you?"

Hating myself for it, I got in. She started off by driving and talk-



ing at the same time, and at a high rate of speed.

"If we move to a better neighborhood," she was saying by the time we were halfway to the place, "the kids can go to a better school and enjoy other benefits. Candy is old enough at ten to make contacts that might be helpful later on in life. Junior is, too, of course. And who can tell how much good it might do you, Tom? You'd get more refined—"

I probably don't have to say it by now, but something promptly went wrong. From the back seat of the car came a noise like a squall

or a gurgle. My nerves shattered to pieces. I signaled Marge to stop the car right away, and I ran to open the back door.

My two kids were sprawled on the floor and hitting each other while they tried to keep from laughing out loud. It was some kind of a game they were playing at this particular time and place, but I saw nothing funny about it.

"How come—?" I began, then glanced over at the picnic basket. "Was this your idea, Marge?"

"I was afraid that the kids might worry and get upset otherwise," she said. "Children should participate in family life as much as possible, according to what I've been reading in articles by experts on child care."

"Are you kidding? Crime doesn't pay, you know, Marge—or haven't you heard about that?"

"A child has to carry obligations, Tom. Any child without responsibilities is on his way to becoming lazy and shiftless."

"Well, that leaves Candy out, at least. Ten years old and already she rides all the way to a heist job. No dice, Marge. Candy is out and so is the boy."

My daughter complained about that by waving her chubby little arms and gurgling like a faucet. If imitating a faucet could bring in money, this kid of mine could have afforded to send the rest of us out to pasture. Thomas junior's face looked almost bigger than his

body, which is quite a trick for him, because even at twelve he's built like a basketball player. I hadn't seen so much misery since the last time Marge persuaded me to watch a minute or so of her favorite soap opera on T.V.

Over the kids' snuffling, Marge said calmly, "Look at it from another point of view, dear. Whatever affects one of us affects us all. We're together in every way and we have to help each other if an emergency comes along. Surely you realize that."

I began stroking my jaw thoughtfully. The job itself wouldn't be any trouble, and all I had to do was get moving afterwards. A family group looked innocent. And if I had told Marge what I was thinking, it would have broken up the marriage once and for all.

"I'm taking it for granted," I said with a polite smile, "that they're not going inside with me."

"Of course not, Tom."

"You're not going inside, either."

"Of course not, Tom. In the place itself you'll be alone unless you want—"

"No, no," I said real fast, and raised my voice: "I expect you kids to stay down there and not move till you're told. You got that?"

"Sure, dad, we get it," Junior said cheerfully.

And Marge snapped, "You children mustn't bother daddy when

he's on the way to work, not even by talking!"

She sounded like she was the only person who could translate what I said to the kids, and you'd have thought they didn't take to English at all, the way I spoke it.

We got to the place, Galway's, finally. I drew a deep breath and, without telling Marge that I was nervous, I reached out for the trusty black bag and had to uncross my fingers to pick the thing up.

I'd almost like to be able to say that the operation went wrong at the start, but it didn't. Nobody bothered me when I walked in looking like a guy on a top-secret mission, then up the stairs and over to the bookkeeping section. The only time I stopped was when I had to adjust the perfumed cambric handkerchief I was using for a mask.

A few short words and a little shoving of money into a black bag, and a minute's business with the clothesline I'd been carrying in one of my pockets and it was almost over.

Outside the bookkeeping office, I stopped to pull off the handkerchief. I said a cheerful hello to somebody at a desk I was passing; and that's all there was to it. That's all, I mean, to getting the money.

The car motor had been warming up all this time, and Marge was driving almost as soon as I got into the seat next to her. As we pulled

down a side street, some burglar alarm or other went off back of me.

"Looks like we made it," I said thankfully. "Okay, kids, you can sit up now."

The kids started asking questions about every detail of the job. At least Junior did. Candy's voice trailed off after the first couple of questions. I hadn't answered anything that the kids asked me.

Finally Candy leaned forward earnestly and whispered to Marge. My wife had been concentrating on driving carefully, but at a good clip. All of a sudden her jaw dropped in surprise and she glanced back wide-eyed at the child. The glance turned into a long painful look, as if she was in agony.

She asked, "Can't you wait just a few minutes, dear?"

"No, mom, I can't." Candy looked all set to burst out crying at the very notion of having to wait.

Marge turned to me. "Don't blow your stack, Tom, but I'll have to stop at a gas station."

"The tank is almost full. What are you talking about?"

"Candy is in agony."

"Well, we can't stop. I've got all the loot here, and I want to hide it away somewhere the sooner the better."

Candy burst out crying at that, and tried to hit her brother when Junior needled her. Junior hit her back and Candy started squalling.

Junior in his turn didn't take too kindly to the idea of being scolded for that. Marge ripped into the two of them and then I got in a few licks at her as well as at the kids. We were one happy family for sure by that time.

Marge found a gas station with clean rest rooms. She didn't listen to my protests, but stopped the car and hurried off to the ladies' room with Candy in tow.

I turned resignedly to my son and heir. "Do you know something, Junior? This is probably the first occasion in the whole history of crime, organized or free-lance, that a getaway car stops in mid-flight because one of the gang has to go to the bathroom."

I ordered Junior to try his luck in the men's room whether he was "in agony" or not. At least there wouldn't be any more crises of that kind during the short trip home.

Marge drove silently to our bank, and insisted on putting the money into the vault we share. To get it over with, I let her take care of that. We got home twenty minutes afterwards.

"Do you see what I mean, dear?" Marge asked as she closed the door and I took my shoes off. "When one member of the family helps the other, things go quickly and there's a glow of satisfaction that comes with being part of a team."

"Oh, rats," I said.

TWO DETECTIVES came around to see us on the next day. A more polite pair I couldn't imagine, wiping their feet on the mat and taking their hats off as they walked inside. They could hardly keep from smiling, these two.

The spokesman said, "You might be interested to know that a definite clue has been picked up to the person who robbed the Galway clock factory yesterday."

"Why should I be interested?" I asked.

"An attractive woman applied for a job in Galway's bookkeeping department only a few days before the robbery took place and gave your wife's name and address," the spokesman told me. "There was no job opening at that time and hadn't been for months. The woman asked a lot of questions about the payroll and how it was handled. She can be identified as your wife, I'm afraid. The description matches perfectly."

"Marge was interested in working there," I replied with caution. "Another income in a family helps a lot, you know, especially when there are two children to support."

"The robbery took place yesterday, like I said," the spokesman went on, still smiling. "A car was seen pulling hurriedly out of the front of the place and its license number was written down. That license number was the one of the car that you and your wife own."

"I can't understand that," I said,

growing decidedly uneasy. I threw a venomous look at Marge and she didn't seem ready to go out dancing just yet, either.

"Worst of all," the spokesman said, "your wife made a visit to a bank vault that you two have and she put in there a number of bills which correspond exactly to the serial numbers of the bills stolen from Galway's. It took time to get that confirmation, but we did it."

"Well—" I wouldn't have known what to say that was likely to be anything but incriminating. The long-time habit of keeping things to myself kept me quiet. Saved me, in fact, as it turned out.

The spokesman, still smiling, gave a little whinny like a horse sometimes does, looked regretful for half a second and said:

"As a result we're taking your wife downtown for detailed questioning. We believe that she did the job."

I was stunned, of course. It occurred to me later on that they must have figured Marge had disguised herself in a man's suit to do the robbery and changed back into woman's clothes shortly afterwards. Whoever took down the license number of our car obviously hadn't seen the number of people inside it. Not only couldn't the smiling detectives prove I had done anything, but they probably had no idea I'd ever been mixed up in a robbery.

"Don't worry," I told Marge qui-

etly just before she was taken away. "I'll get you the best lawyers, but you have to keep quiet, of course. That's the only way to help me, and don't forget we're a family."

"B-but you won't be going to jail," she said tearfully.

It was no time to point out that

her idea of helping each other at all times did have a few drawbacks here and there. Besides, we wouldn't be completely separated. I'd see her on visitor's days and I'd write to her once a week. That was the least I could do while we were paying the price for *our* crime and I couldn't argue it away.

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The Trouble With SUMMER

*To witness a brutal crime as an innocent
bystander can sometimes expose a man to
danger . . . at a certain season of the year.*

A POWERFUL CRIME NOVELET

by ED DAVIS

SHE SEEMED TO BE fighting a losing battle with the drunk across the street by the cleaning shop, and some latent chivalrous impulse—I like to think it was that—aimed me in that direction. Unfortunately, the light changed and a truck was suddenly blocking my path.

I only heard what came next—the crash of shattering glass, a loud scream and the burglar alarm—an indifferent, piercing clang in

the two a.m. stillness of a Monday night in the Big City.

The truck pulled to a stop and the driver and I got to the girl just as the all-night luncheonette two doors down from the cleaning shop began filling the street with curious spectators.

She was lying on the sidewalk surrounded and partly covered by chunks of broken glass, her blouse and bermuda shorts so soaked with blood that their color of a



few seconds ago. was completely lost.

The drunk, shocked into some semblance of sobriety, slumped numbly onto a nearby doorstep mumbling almost incoherently, "I didn't mean it. Oh God, I didn't mean it."

I yanked off my shirt and began ripping it into strips. The truck driver, a kid in his early twenties, nodded from me to the drunk. "He lifted her over his head and threw her. I never saw anything like it. She landed on her feet inside the shop, then she staggered back onto the sidewalk and just collapsed."

"Anybody call an ambulance?" I yelled.

"I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it," repeated the drunk in numb staccato.

"I'll call the hospital," said a pony-tailed kid in a tone of excitingly-new sudden self-importance.

I knelt beside the girl. At least she was still alive. She must have thrown her arms over her face when she went through the window because her face was uncut. But both of her wrists were bleeding badly. She was pretty—maybe twenty-three or four. But the agony of unbelieving bewilderment in her blue eyes gave her the look of a lost and terrified child.

I made a quick check. Her wrists and left leg seemed the most dangerously cut. I wound one

of the strips from my shirt tight around her right wrist, and as I moved to the other side, I saw that she was fully conscious and watching me.

"You'll be okay," I whispered. "The ambulance is on its way."

Her lips formed a "thank you", and in the second before she passed out, she looked as though she believed me.

I'd started on the other wrist when suddenly a hand was clamped on my shoulder, jerking me off-balance.

"Hey, what's the matter with you?" I looked up and saw a short, fat little guy in an expensive suit with a patent-leather shine on his black hair. He was standing between me and the girl. "Don't you know better than to touch a accident victim?" he demanded.

My words came out carefully. "I'm not going to argue your point. Now get the hell out of my way."

"I'm not going to stand here and watch you monkey around so Laurie dies. Wait for the doctor."

"He's only tryin' to help," said the truck driver. The crowd stood around watching. It was like a scene in a play where nobody is allowed to take part.

I shrugged my shoulders like I'd given up, then jumped to my feet and gave the guy a violent shove. Three people got out of the way fast, so he wouldn't fall on them and he landed on the sidewalk.

A police siren announced the arrival of the cops in response to the burglar alarm that was still shrilling through the night.

I got back beside the girl. But Junior with the shiney hair wasn't about to give up. That was plain to see. The truckdriver interceded again and this time he got slugged for his trouble. Give me credit for restraint. I waited until a stubby hand descended on my shoulder again before I swung around and slammed my fist into Junior's gut.

Four cops climbed out of one of the cars while two of them grabbed me, and the other two grabbed the truckdriver. Junior disappeared into the crowd.

"Stop him!" I yelled, trying to get an arm free so I could point. That was a mistake, for it made both cops decide I was the violent type. One of them went for his club.

"Okay, okay—" I made like a statue.

The ambulance arrived and I glanced at the girl. Her face was chalk-white now and I was far from sure she was still alive.

The truckdriver shook his head. "You should have stopped that guy!"

"What guy?" the cop who had hold of my arm asked.

"The little fat guy," volunteered one of the onlookers. "But he didn't mean no harm. You see, this guy—" he indicated me: "was try-



ing to stop the girl from bleeding and the little fella was afraid he'd make things worse by touching her."

"You see what happened?" asked the cop.

"No, sir."

He looked at me. "Who are you?"

"My name's Tad Mangus," I said. "I was in the bar across the street."

"You see what happened?"

"No."

"Where's your shirt?"

I pointed to what was left of it lying in the gutter. Two cops half-carried the drunk into one of the squad cars. "I didn't mean it," he kept repeating over and over. "Oh God help me. I have a wife. I didn't mean it."

"Anybody see what happened?"

"I did," volunteered the truckdriver. "He just lifted her up and hurled her."

A late-model Ford pulled up and a sleepy-looking guy in a cheap suit climbed out. "I'm from the *Sun-Telegram*," he announced. "What happened?"

"We're still trying to find out," said one of the cops.

"A girl got pushed through the window," came a familiar voice. I recognized the kid with the ponytail. "I called the ambulance," she added in suitably solemn tones. "She's dead."

I turned to the nearest cop. "Is that right?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

A plainclothesman joined our little group; tall, sandy-haired, and wearing horn-rimmed glasses. "Somebody said you made bandages out of your shirt. Go over to the hospital. They'll give you another one."

"Bandages from shirt," mumbled the reporter, scribbling away. "What's your name?"

The plainclothesman nodded towards his car. "Come on, you don't have to tell him anything. I'll give you a lift."

"Hey," called the reporter. "What's your name?"

II

I CLIMBED IN beside the cop. The burglar alarm was still running.

He started driving and I sat back. It was a cool summer evening—even cooler with the wind

through the open car-window, and I began really missing my shirt.

Laurie. The guy with the shiney hair had called her Laurie, which meant he knew her. If his intentions had been as pure as he claimed, why hadn't he stayed around to find out how she was?

I took a second look at the cop. "Do they usually send a plainclothesman on a burglar alarm?" I asked.

He shook his head and offered me a cigarette. "I'm an Assistant D.A. I live in the area and just happened to hear the commotion."

I took the cigarette, and lit it with fingers that trembled a little. "Thanks. I'm Tad Mangus."

"Frank Salzman."

I glanced sideways at him, studying him more closely. "How's the girl?" I asked. "Do you think she'll live?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "She was alive when they put her in the ambulance. That's all I know. Who was the fat guy? The one who hit you?"

"I never saw him before," I told him. "But he must have known the girl. He called her Laurie."

"Yeah. Laurie Hunter. Nice kid. You live around here?" Salzman asked.

"No," I said. "Just passing through."

"From where to where?"

"From Los Angeles to New York."

"Isn't this pretty much out of your way?"

"Pretty much," I agreed. "I stopped off to see an old army buddy."

"Anybody I might know?"

I shrugged my shoulders. It was none of his damned business.

He seemed to be waiting for an answer, but he let it go. We pulled to a stop in front of a large white building with ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL inscribed above the door in block letters. He led the way to the side door marked *Emergency Entrance*, and I felt like I'd suddenly walked into one of the Hell circles in "The Divine Comedy." Two beds on wheels were in the hall, one of them holding a semi-corpse who'd obviously been severely beaten; the other held what was left of a derelict. He was strapped down and still trembling convulsively.

A wide entrance led to a room overcrowded with accident victims, most of them in need of immediate attention. I looked from the room back to Salzman. "The girl isn't in *there*?"

"I don't think so." He showed his identification at the desk, said something I couldn't hear, then walked back to me. "She's upstairs in emergency surgery. Come on. We'll get you a shirt. Then you can go up."

Ten minutes later, I was rolling up the sleeves on a shirt that was too small. "All right if I hang

around? I'd like to know if she's going to be okay."

"Sure. You'll have to wait in the waiting room on the first floor. If it's possible, we'll want to get a statement from her."

There were about eleven people in the waiting room and I recognized some of them as having been at the accident. All the chairs were taken, so I parked on the floor.

About twenty minutes later, a pock-marked little cop stopped one of the nurses at the doorway. "I'm looking for a guy with no shirt," he said. "Some kid with a ponytail said he's about thirty, tall, good-looking, blue eyes, brown hair—"

Good looking! I had a fan. I stood up. "About the girl who went through the window?"

The cop nodded. He led the way to a small office on the second floor and a tired-looking doctor in his early fifties glanced at me over a cluttered desk.

I pulled up a chair and sat down opposite him. "How is she?" I asked.

"Priest just gave her the last rites. She wouldn't have been alive to receive them if you hadn't tied up her wrist. Why didn't you finish the job?"

"Somebody stopped me. Would it have made a difference?"

"One hell of a difference. We might have been able to save her."

"I should have broken his head—"

"Huh?"

"A man who knew her came along and stopped me. He said I had no right to touch an accident victim, since I wasn't a doctor."

He shook his head. "The wife of the drunk who hurled her through the store window was just here. She swears he's a regular lamb when he's sober. But this afternoon he won the factory baseball pool and celebrated by getting drunk. If he hadn't won the pool, or if the girl had been walking along any other street—"

He didn't finish. He didn't have to.

Somebody knocked on the door and opened it before either of us could say anything. It was a cop. "You Tad Mangus?"

I nodded.

"Somebody wants to see you."

I followed him to the hall outside the first-floor waiting room. A girl in her early twenties wearing bermuda shorts and a white jersey-top walked over to us. "Tad Mangus?" she asked.

I nodded, trying to keep my eyes on her face. If I'd kept looking at the rest of her, what I was thinking would have been too obvious and they were not the kind of thoughts one is supposed to think in solemn moments.

"Do you have to stay here?" she asked seriously.

"I'd rather not leave," I said,

"until I know how the girl is."

Her lips tightened and I couldn't tell whether she was angry or badly shaken. Maybe it was both. "She's dead," she answered quietly. "Have you got time for a cup of coffee?"

"By all means," I said, giving her arm a pat. "Coffee will make us both feel better."

We went to a luncheonette, four blocks down. I could still hear the damned burglar alarm, faint because it was further away, but still clanging at the same pitch. Lousy night, and I had to be stern with myself. Don't think about her. Everybody dies. You've seen death before; you've seen plenty of it in Korea.

But in Korea, I couldn't help remembering, there had been no morbidly gaping crowds. Nobody's death had been a circus side show for sale, smug, self-important night crawlers. Maybe that's what was making her death get under my skin more than the others. Hers was without purpose.

I stopped in front of the luncheonette. "I could go for something stronger than coffee. How about you?"

She glanced down at her bermudas, then back at me. "I'd feel funny going into a bar in these."

"You live around here?" I asked.

She hesitated, then nodded.

"Got anything to drink?"

"Yes. Come on."

III

HER APARTMENT was a second-story walkup with the bed in the middle of the livingroom. She flipped on the overhead light, then glanced at me uncomfortably and walked into the kitchen. It was a good-sized kitchen.

The bed, the desk and, just about every other level surface was covered with papers. I took a good look. There were newspaper clippings, handouts, posters and signed petitions, all about a fight that was being waged to have a parking lot and some old warehouses turned into a park and playground.

I laughed. "Hey, is this your apartment, or the local community center?"

She came back into the livingroom with a bottle of Scotch and two glasses. Apparently she'd just washed them, because they were still wet.

She smiled, awkwardly, and cleared a place for me to sit on the bed. The space she cleared for herself was halfway across the room.

I tried to keep my face straight. Sure, the thought had entered my mind, but I wasn't intending to get violent about it.

She downed her drink in two swallows. "Somebody said you talked to her before she died. Is that true?"

"Talked to her—"

"While you were tying up her wrists."

I tried to remember and after a moment it came back to me. "Yeah," I answered drily. "I told her not to worry—told her she'd be okay."

She seemed disappointed. "Is that all?"

I nodded. "I just thought it might help a little. You do what you can." She was getting me curious.

She hesitated, and her next question told me she was being careful. "Do you live around here?"

"No."

She waited as though she expected more of an answer. To hell with it. Let her ask. She did. "May I ask what you're doing here in town?"

If the D.A. had put the same questions to me I probably would have told him to mind his own business. But the D.A. didn't have green eyes and a long black pony tail and a body I enjoyed watching.

"I stopped off to see an old army buddy," I said. "He owes me some money. I got in Saturday, and he told me he'd need at least three working days to raise it. After I collect, I'm going to New York. My brother just opened a highway restaurant and wants me to go into partnership with him. I'm staying at the Russel Hotel."



I picked up one of the petitions. "What are all these circulars about?" I asked. "I've never seen more of them—even at a political rally."

She smiled, apparently more relaxed. At first I figured it was because at least fifteen minutes had gone by and we'd managed to keep the conversation on a high level and I hadn't made a pass at her. Then I began wondering whether the liquor was hitting her. It was after four a.m., and maybe she was just as tired as I was.

She made a sweeping gesture with her hand. "That's all publicity material about the park fight," she said. "Last year the city allotted this community half a million dollars for a park. It's part of the mayor's community conservation program, and we're supposed to let them know where we want it. Anybody who really cares

about the community knows that it should be on Elm Street.

"Unfortunately, there's a small group of property owners who want it over near Kane Square. Kane is one of the worst slum sections in the whole city. A park there would be so full of delinquents, pushers and derelicts that no mother would dare let her child play in it. Elm Street is close enough to Kane. The kids who live in Kane could use it, but the derelicts wouldn't think it was their park and take over. As a rule, derelicts stay in their own neighborhood."

"But if the property owners are only a small group—"

She shook her head. "They talk with a loud voice. You see, most of the people around here don't give a damn about anything political or civic until it strikes home to them in a personal way, and by then it's too late. We've got two major civic organizations—the Community Planning Council and the Neighborhood Civic Association. According to the registered membership, they represent about eighty percent of the community. Want me to tell how it really works?"

I tried to keep my face straight. "Sure, go ahead," I said. "It sounds interesting."

"At the last CPC meeting," she went on quickly, "there were thirty-six members present. It was an election meeting. A selected

few dragged it out until after one a.m., and by the time the votes were taken, there were only twenty-one members present. Fifteen of them were the 'right' fifteen, and naturally the 'right' people got elected. Same setup with the NCA. So now the presidents go to the meetings at City Hall and say, 'I represent the membership of the organization that elected me.'

"That's what I mean when I say the property owners around Kane Square are a minority that speaks with a loud voice. And it happened because nobody gave a damn until it was too late. They're claiming the whole community wants the 'park in Kane Square.'

She lowered her head and her eyes met mine accusingly. "You don't really care, do you?"

This time the smile showed. "I don't live here."

"That's not the point. Don't you care whether a thing is morally right or not?"

"As long as it doesn't cost me anything, honey. I am certainly in favor of mothers and Christmas and virtue."

"That's awful!"

"How old are you?"

She looked startled. "Twenty three. Why?"

"What kind of work do you do?" I asked.

"I'm a personal secretary. Why?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I was

just curious. You sounded disappointed when I told you that the girl who died hadn't said anything to me. What did you want her to say?"

"I don't know," she answered quietly. "She called me and said she had something important to tell me. She used to be secretary of the CPC—"

"Community Planning Council," I interrupted, trying to keep it straight.

She nodded. "Anyway, she was going through all her old records and she said she'd found something that alarmed her and wanted to tell me about it."

"Why didn't she tell you over the phone?" I asked. "And why did it have to be at two in the morning? Why couldn't it wait until tomorrow?"

"She couldn't tell me over the phone, because there was a chance that the line might be tapped."

At that point, I decided she was emotionally overwrought, to put it mildly. My thoughts must have showed on my face because *her* face turned scarlet.

"No, Mr. Mangus, I'm not crazy. There's half a million dollars at stake, and that's certainly worth the risk of tapping a line. You see, those property owners can sell their slum buildings for twice what they're worth—if Kane Square gets the park. The trouble is—most of the buildings are owned under corporation names

and nobody can prove who the real owners are.

"If we could just prove that some of our hypocritical 'civic leaders' have a financial interest in making a profit we could get the rest of the community angry enough to do something about it. We could go down and picket City Hall. Or bring pressure on the politicians in other ways. Get the mothers to line up with their kids, for instance, if they try to break ground for a Kane Square Park. Show them they're being taken, and get them mad enough to do something before it's too late!"

I let out a low whistle. "Well, thanks for the drink."

She jumped to her feet. "What you need is for some of this to hit you where it hurts."

"Honey, I could tell you what you need. But you wouldn't like it."

"What do—" She broke off like she figured she'd gotten it, but still wasn't quite sure.

I started for the door, but she caught up with me. "What do you mean, you could tell me what I need?" she demanded.

I leaned down and kissed her lips—quickly, and before she had a chance to suspect what I had in mind. "Exactly what you think I mean," I answered quietly. "Good night." I glanced at the sunlight pouring in through the window blinds. "Or maybe I should say 'good morning.'"

I'd expected her to be furious. Instead, she looked interested. "Will I see you again?" she asked.

"Do you want to?"

"Do I want to *what*?" The color was rising in her cheeks now.

"See me again," I answered, grinning.

She shrugged her shoulders, but her eyes said that she did.

"I'll call you," I said. "I'm only going to be here for a couple more days, but maybe we can have dinner." I'd almost forgotten something I should have asked her at the hospital. "What's your name?" I asked.

She smiled. "Julie Mitchell."

I kissed her again, and this time she put her arms around me. I kept it wholesome.

"I'm physically attracted to you," she said afterwards, "but I'm still not sure whether I like you."

I laughed. "Well I'm 'physically attracted' to you too, honey. I'll call you."

I got back to my hotel, showered, and hit the sack.

IV

IT WAS LATE afternoon when I woke up. I called Max Hogan, my good old army buddy. I'd gotten to know him quite well in Korea when the rest of our outfit had been wiped out. My head had been cut and his leg was a mess. He'd come close to losing it. I'd

carried him on my back, four miles to our lines and there were times when I couldn't quite get over the feeling I'd been carrying him ever since.

I'd loaned him money—three thousand bucks, to be exact. When he'd told me he was in a life-and-death jam over some gambling debts I'd scraped together everything I had. I'm still not sure why I'd given him all that dough. If I hadn't tied up his leg and carried him back to our lines, he'd have died.

I remembered the countless times I'd checked to make sure his heart was still beating, and when we finally did get back, I hadn't been able to sleep until the medic told me he'd probably pull through. It was insane but from the minute I'd hoisted him onto my shoulders I'd felt responsible for him—and the feeling had lasted, even after both of us were out of service.

I'd tried not to let him know. I'd been a real ugly son in the way I'd talked to him. I'd tried to stay out of his way, but it was no good. Max Hogan had an uncanny instinct for uncovering anything that might be for the sole benefit of Mr. Max Hogan.

He answered on the second ring. "Yeah?"

"Max? This is Tad."

"Oh, hiya, pal. I was just going to call you."

Sure, I thought. He would say

that. "How you doing on raising the money?"

"I've got it. All of it. Come over to the office and pick it up," Hogan said.

Something was wrong. Max simply wasn't the kind of guy to part with anything over ten bucks that easily—and certainly not in one day when I'd given him three. "Cash?" I prodded.

"On the line." He laughed. "It doesn't pay to be too skeptical, Tad. Come on over."

"Be there in half an hour," I said. I hung up and checked my watch. It was four-thirty and I hadn't eaten since dinner yesterday.

I felt dizzy when I climbed out of bed. I shaved, took another shower, dressed, and settled for coffee and toast at the corner drugstore. The evening was warm and sticky. I figured the day I'd just slept through was worth missing.

It was about another four blocks to Max's office. I walked along, looking for the sign. It hung out over the street like a shingle: MAX HOGAN, REAL ESTATE.

The office itself was small and could have used a coat of paint. When I'd first seen it, I'd been surprised that he hadn't simply pleaded poverty as an excuse and made it plain that I couldn't count on his ever raising the money.

The instant I walked into the

office he jumped to his feet, sticking out his hand. "Hiya, pal."

We shook hands briefly, and I was still trying to figure out what the hell was going on when he moved back to his desk, unlocked the top drawer, and handed me a manila envelope.

"It's all there, Tad. Do you want to count it? If you'll step away from the window I'll close the door."

I took him up on the offer. Yup—three thousand in nice, crisp thousand-dollar bills. For half a second, I thought the three big bills might be counterfeit. But closer inspection convinced me otherwise.

I stuck the money in my inside jacket-pocket and sat down on a chair opposite his desk. "Okay, Max. What's up?"

He was nervous. Maybe somebody else wouldn't have noticed, but I'd known him too long.

"What's the matter, Tad?" he asked. "You got the money. That's what you came for."

"Yeah, but it was a little too quick and easy," I said. "What's wrong?"

I was watching him closely and it seemed to increase his discomfort. He was a tall, heavysset guy about six years older than I was with black hair and steel-gray eyes. When he was in a tight spot, he'd smile, but his jaw muscles would twitch. It was happening now.

Then his face seemed to relax. "Okay, Tad, I'll level with you. Something *is* up, but it doesn't concern you. I got you the money right away so you wouldn't ask me a lot of questions I'd rather not answer. Do both of us a favor and leave the city, as you said you'd do as soon as I'd cleared this debt."

"If it doesn't concern me," I began carefully, "why does it matter whether I leave or not?"

"Oh, for Pete's sake! Have you got any reason to *stay*?"

I thought of Julie Mitchell. "Yeah. A girl. I'm afraid I can't leave right away."

That seemed to give him a jolt. "Tad, if I asked it as a favor—"

"You said you'd level with me. You want to tell me all of it?"

Max looked away. "No."

I stood up and shrugged my shoulders. "Suit yourself."

"How long will you be around?"

"I don't know," I said. "A few days. Maybe a week."

He looked badly shaken. I waited, but apparently the subject was closed. "Goodbye, Max," I said. "Thanks for the money."

As I emerged from the building I reached for a cigarette, then remembered I'd left the pack on his desk. I turned and went back into his office. He was on the phone but he hung up as soon as he saw me. He'd been right in the middle of a sentence, "Yeah, but what else can I—"

I looked at him, expecting some sort of explanation—even a plausible lie. His eyes met mine and he forced an awkward smile, his jaw muscles twitching. But that was all.

I took my cigarettes from his desk and walked out.

I took the money back to my hotel and asked the desk clerk to lock it in the safe. Tomorrow I could take it to a local bank and arrange to have it transferred to my brother's bank in New York City.

It was almost five-thirty. I figured I'd wait until six before I phoned Julie and asked her to have dinner with me.

I sat down on the edge of my bed and lit a cigarette. I was annoyed as hell with Max. Whatever it was, he could have told me. Even if he was mixed up in something illegal, he knew me well enough to be sure I would never go to the police.

At a quarter to six, I called Julie. She answered on the fifth ring and sounded out of breath. "Hello?"

"Julie? This is Tad. I promised I'd phone, remember?"

"I didn't forget, Tad. Wait a minute. I was out in the hall when I heard the phone ringing and I'm still out of breath. I want to get a cigarette."

She was back about ten seconds later and sounded more relaxed. "All right, Tad—go ahead."

"Are you free for dinner?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I'd fall asleep in the middle of it. I'm just going to drink some Metrecal and take a nap. How about *after* dinner?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Sure. What time?"

"Well—did you have any place in mind you particularly wanted to go?"

"No," I said.

"Okay. I have. Suppose you pick me up at eight."

A surprise! I laughed. "Okay."

V

AT FIVE AFTER eight, I knocked on the door to her apartment. She opened it, wearing a black and white polka dot dress with a full skirt. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she looked a lot younger than twenty-three. I was thirty-four, and seeing her like that made me feel suddenly almost too old for her.

Then I figured to hell with it. She was all ready to leave, but I closed the door behind me and took her into my arms. She was wearing some kind of perfume that smelled like spring and her hair was like silk under my fingers. "Hey, what do you think you're—"

I silenced her protest with my lips, and after about two seconds, she was co-operating—until my hand fumbled her bosom.



She broke away, awkwardly, and began straightening her hair. "You certainly are aggressive," she said seriously.

At first I thought she was trying to be cute, but when I looked at her eyes I decided I'd probably been wrong.

When we reached the street,

she took my hand and I began feeling uncomfortable again. There was something almost dangerously sweet about it. She seemed like a high school kid on her first date.

"Okay," I asked finally. "Where are we going?"

She smiled. "About one more block."

We came to the end of it, and she smiled. "There!"

I stopped, abruptly. "Oh no!" It was a large, square building with COMMUNITY CENTER chiseled in stone above the entranceway. A billboard outside announced the regular monthly membership meeting of the Neighborhood Civic Association. The main item on the agenda was a floor debate on the location of the new park.

"Julie," I said quietly.

"Please?"

"Honey, I don't even live here."

"You can keep me company." She tightened her hand over mine.

"Okay," I said, capitulating. "But I won't promise to stay to the end."

The auditorium would normally have seated about five-hundred, not counting the balcony. But there were only about two hundred people present. We took seats near the back. About a fifth of the seated men and women were ignoring the NO SMOKING signs, so I leaned back and lit a cigarette.

There were six chairs and a

front-and-center microphone on stage. But so far none of the speakers had appeared on the platform. I glanced at the door, measuring the distance and hoping it wouldn't be embarrassingly conspicuous for Julie when I walked out.

"They've been tabling this debate for months," she said. The general hum of voices made it possible for her to speak naturally without attracting the attention of the man sitting next to us. "They've been waiting until now—to make sure that a good many of the people with children will be out of town for the summer.

"At least half of the people here are tied in with the local political club. The NCA president is a heavy contributor, so the club backs him whenever he acts in a high-handed way."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't a motion and just one seconding voice table a proposal and make sure it will be put to a vote?"

"I think so. Why?"

"If it does—why couldn't somebody who wants the park on Elm Street table it tonight?"

Julie laughed. "Because they'd have to be recognized by the president and he won't do it. I suspect they're going to try and bring it to a vote." She stood up. "Excuse me—I want to make sure Marion's here."

She looked around, waved to somebody, and then sat down again. "Yes, she's here."

"That good?" I asked.

"Oh, she's wonderful. She has five kids."

I didn't quite see the connection, but I let it pass.

"Over there—" she prodded. "The woman with the green hat."

I looked, but never quite made it to the green hat. Two rows up, one seat in from the aisle, was a familiar face—Max Hogan! I did a fast double take. I had no doubt at all that it was really Max.

The house lights dimmed, the general chatter subsided and the stage lights went up.

I did another double take. The guy stepping up to the microphone was the fat shiney-haired little man who'd kept me from bandaging the wrists of a girl whose life might have been saved if he hadn't interfered.

"That's Marty Polizeo," whispered Julie. "He's the one with all the political connections. That's how he got in. The clubhouse hacks made sure he'll be free to ignore or over-rule anyone who opposes him."

Polizeo opened with an announcement that they'd try to keep the regular business short so there'd be more time for the debate. Half an hour later, he concluded with an announcement of the girl's death.

"She was active in many of the programs," he said, "making this community a better place to live." The phoney solemnity sickened

me and I wondered whether *anybody* was buying it.

He followed by suggesting that they take a voice vote on appropriating twenty-five dollars from the treasury to send flowers to her funeral, and I began getting the same feeling I'd had last night. This wasn't real. It was all part of a circus side show.

"And now—" He grinned like a patronizing father about to present his children with all kinds of Christmas goodies. "And now I think we can discuss the chief matter before us—the location of our new park."

Julie nudged me. "Look—there's Marion."

I looked. Sure enough, the hand belonging to the green hat had shot right up!

Marty Polizeo recognized someone else—in a man at the back of the hall who went into a long eulogy on the virtues of a park in Kane Square.

About four Kane-Square advocates later, Marion green-hat rose to her feet. "Marty," she began in a loud, firm voice, "I have had my hand up for forty-five minutes, and you've *refused* to recognize me!"

Polizeo looked uncomfortable. "Marion, there were other people who—"

"I know. People who see eye to eye with you!"

A burst of applause broke out. I looked at Julie. She was clapping

longer and harder than anyone else.

"You call this a debate," Marion green-hat continued. "All right. Suppose we hear from some of the mothers. They have a *decent* stake in the location of the park!"

I had to admit she was terrific.

Another woman rose to her feet. Apparently she had plenty of courage, but she lacked the other woman's poise. "I'm president of the Elm Street School PTA, and at our last meeting—"

Marty Polizeo interrupted her by banging his gavel. "We can't permit anyone to speak without recognition from the platform. This is an orderly debate!"

"It's *not* a debate. It's a railroad!"

Applause followed. But apparently the Kane Square faction was more alert now, because the hand-clapping was mingled with boos.

Then Julie was on her feet. "She's absolutely right! Those of you who booed know it!"

Polizeo pointed a fat finger at her, and then seemed to freeze. He was looking straight at me. The house lights were dimmer than the ones directly over the stage. But there was no spotlight, and I realized he could see into the audience fairly well.

After a moment, he managed to recall where he was. But his face was pale when he finally banged his gavel and yelled into the microphone, above the boos,

feet-stamping and applause that the meeting was adjourned.

"You haven't the authority—" shouted Julie's mentor.

Polizeo quickly gestured to a tall skinny guy who rose to his feet and made a formal motion. It was seconded, and the stage lights blinked out, the house lights brightening.

Polizeo made a fast exit through a side door leading to the street. Julie grabbed my hand and pulled me along with her to where Marion was talking with several other women.

"Well," she was saying, "at least we kept it from coming to a vote."

"Next time they'll be prepared," said Julie. "You took them by surprise."

"Next time we'll have a mother's picket line blocking the entrance. If they try and bring it to a vote under *those* conditions the newspapers will make them wish they hadn't." She saw me then and frowned. "Who's he?"

The tone of her voice said I might be Public Enemy No. One, and it startled me.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Julie. "Marion, this is Tad Mangus. Tad—Marion Wegman. Tad's just a friend. He doesn't live here."

Marion Wegman gave me a brief nod, then turned back to the women she'd been talking with when we'd arrived.

I saw another familiar face and waved. Tall, sandy-haired Frank

Salzman waved back, but there was a puzzled look on his face.

Marion Wegman caught the interchange and stared at me accusingly. "I thought you didn't live around here."

"I don't."

"How come you know Frank?"

I decided I didn't like her. "I committed a felony last month. He prosecuted the case." I turned to Julie. "Shall we go?"

Julie gave me a look that said I'd been more than rude to her friend. I hesitated, then apologized. What the hell? I told Marion Wegman about the accident, briefly, without mentioning that I'd recognized Marty Polizeo.

I still hadn't decided what, if anything, I'd do about that. I doubted whether wilful intent to let the girl die could ever be proven. Besides, it was none of my business. The girl was dead and implicating Polizeo wouldn't bring her back.

I glanced at Julie, trying to decide whether I really wanted to stay around any longer. Like Max Hogan had said, I had the money. I might as well leave.

Frank Salzman pushed his way to my side. "I never expected to see you here," he said."

I nodded towards Julie. "I got conned into it."

Marion gave Salzman a reasonably pleasant smile. "I'm beginning to wonder whether you've got a point, Frank. It just might pay us

to bring it up at the next meeting, and see what the reaction is."

Salzman shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter to me. I just like to see everybody happy."

Marion snorted. "Happy! You know as well as I do what would make Marty Polizeo happy. That park in Kane Square."

Julie touched my arm and whispered, "At the last meeting, in a confidential conversation, Salzman suggested a location *between* Kane Square and Elm Street."

"Marion," said Salzman, "you don't actually know that Marty owns some property down there. He might be perfectly sincere, and really believe it would put the whole area on the upgrade."

Her smile was patronizing. "All right, Frank, you belong to Marty's political club, so naturally you're loyal to him."

For half a second, I thought he was going to flare up at her. Then his lips tightened, and he shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Marion Wegman turned to Julie. "You know, he just might have come up with something we can use. If we suggested *two* possible locations and Marty's faction still insisted on Kane Square we might end up with a lot more support. Some of the neutrals might finally realize that the whole crowd has a vested interest in the square!"

Julie nodded, then shook her head thoughtfully. "Laurie called me before she died. She had some-

thing to tell me. She was supposed to turn the Planning Council minutes over to the new secretary. But she kept them instead and went over them carefully. She had the whole file. It must have gone back about twenty years. Do you suppose whatever she wanted to tell me might have had something to do with the minutes? Maybe they're still at her apartment."

VI

I LET OUT a deep breath. "Well good-night, honey," I said. "Have fun." I started for the door, but Julie caught my arm.

"Tad, wait a minute—" she pleaded.

"Look, you don't have any authority to go into that girl's apartment." I pointed out. "Besides—"

"For heaven's sake, who would know? The tenant who has the apartment above hers is a friend of mine. He'd let me go down the fire escape, and he'd certainly never tell anyone. I'm sure of that."

"That's not the point," I said. "What do you expect to find anyway?"

"A complete file of the minutes," she answered seriously. "Look, the present secretary replaced Laurie just when the rest of Marty's crowd was moving in on all the civic organizations. If there is anything in those minutes that Marty wouldn't like anyone to know about you can be sure it

won't be there when she gets her hands on them."

I asked curiously, "Where does Marty Polizeo get all this power?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Money. He's a lawyer. His father was a big lawyer during the twenties. He made a fortune defending gangsters. Most of Marty's own legal cases are real estate, but he inherited money and contacts. Besides, he has lived here all his life. That seems to carry plenty of weight when he tries to justify his election as president of the Association."

I'd almost forgotten about Marion Wegman. "Maybe Mr. Mangus is right," she said seriously. Then she winked at Julie. "Of course, if you just went ahead and did it, I don't suppose I could stop you."

Julie grinned and I shook my head. "You're nuts. See you around."

She grabbed my sleeve. "Please, Tad, you could stand out in the hall, and knock if a policeman shows up."

"No thanks," I said and walked out.

At first I was annoyed, then I smiled. I suppose if it weren't for the Marions and Julies, the Martys could take over without opposition and it's the little guy in the middle who gets squashed. I guess if I'd lived in the community and had a couple of kids, I'd have been more concerned.

Then I remembered how empty

the meeting hall had seemed. Where were they—the little guys in the middle with kids, the ones whose tax money was about to build a park they'd either use or want to stay away from, depending on its location? And where had they been the night Marty Polizeo had gotten himself elected into a position where he could pretend he was speaking for them and make the city fathers listen?

Maybe they'd been too tired to exert themselves. Maybe they'd had a hard day at work.

They still should have been there. The Marions and the Julies were doing their work, *really* putting in the time, and more than willing to keep it up. All they needed was support. Votes. Signatures on a petition.

I was about two blocks from my hotel. The night had grown cooler, but the air was still heavy with moisture, and I was glad I'd be spending at least part of the day on an air-conditioned plane New York bound.

I waited for the light to change, then started across the street. It was close to eleven, and the street was practically deserted. Practically—but not quite!

A dark blue Buick had pulled out of the shadows, and was moving too fast to stop for the light.

I headed back for the curb, then saw that there was another car coming from the opposite direction—moving just as fast. If I tried to

make it back to the curb, I'd be right in its path!

It all happened so quickly I could hardly think. The Buick was practically on top of me when I hit the pavement, rolling between the two front wheels, and flattening out on my back. I lay rigid and straight for a few seconds, waiting for the sound of scrunched bones and wondering whether the numbness and shock would keep me from feeling too much of the pain.

Then the deafening roar of the motor was gone. The cars had met and passed and I was still in one piece. My head throbbed, but nothing was broken.

I put my palms flat against the pavement and pushed until I was sitting up. Then I got to my feet and staggered to the curb where I flopped down again, leaning against a lamp post.

By a kind of miracle my strength returned—enough strength at least to enable me to walk without stumbling. I made it back to my hotel room and stretched out on the bed, after carefully locking the door and bracing a chair under the knob, just to be on the safe side.

I thought of calling the cops, then wondered whether they'd believe me. Sure, I could bring in Max and Marty Polizeo. The truck-driver could back me up on Polizeo stopping me from tying up the girl's wrist, and the cops probably already had his name and address. He'd be the prosecutor's key wit-

ness against the drunk who'd shoved her through the window.

I thought back, trying to piece together everything that had happened that night. The girl, Laurie Hunter, had been on her way to meet Julie Mitchell with some information relating to the park. Presumably, this information had been gleaned from the Community Planning Council minutes. She'd wanted to deliver it in person because both of them were afraid her line might be tapped.

Then I thought of the drunk. Had his timing been helpful to Marty Polizeo—or perhaps just the opposite?

Supposing she hadn't run into the drunk. Supposing she'd simply continued on down the street to some alley or crossing where a convenient accident was waiting—maybe an accident with a blue Buick.

And whoever might have been at the wheel of that Buick must have thought the gods were on his side that night—until I showed up and started stopping the blood.

Polizeo? What the hell was he doing on that particular corner at two a.m. Monday night? Had I forced him into showing his face?

I wondered what kind of a car he owned. Could it be a blue Buick?

I closed my eyes and tried to remember the other car that had come at me. What color? Red? Maroon? Yeah, that was it. Ma-

room. I wondered how many thousand maroon cars were rolling around the city.

VII

I OPENED THE closet, pulled down my suitcase and started packing. Some guys are natural-born heroes. Not me. The money was in the hotel safe and I could probably make it to the bank and then to the airport by eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. I called the airlines. There was a plane to New York at noon. I booked a reservation and finished packing.

I was all ready to try and get some sleep when I thought of Julie. Laurie Hunter had been killed because she knew something and Julie, at that moment, was in Laurie's apartment trying to find out what that something was.

I hesitated, then looked up Laura Hunter's address in the phone book, riffling through the pages with fingers that shook a little.

I kept telling myself I was nuts. It wasn't my fight. But as soon as I had the address I left the hotel. I walked along the street, listening to the sound of my footsteps. When I came to the corner I took a long look in both directions.

The street where Laurie Hunter had lived was dark and quiet. I started up the stairs to the entrance and a sudden movement made me

jump back. It was only a couple of teenagers saying good night with extreme friendliness. The girl looked embarrassed and the guy seemed annoyed.

I went inside and checked the mailboxes. LAURA HUNTER—3F. I walked to the second floor and checked the numbers, so I'd know which was 3F as soon as I reached the floor above. That way, if someone else was in the hall I could keep right on walking.

I reached 3F—and kept walking.

The guy was standing outside the apartment, smoking a cigarette. He took a good look at me and his face said he was curious.

I walked up to the fourth floor and then came half-way down again—quietly.

I could hear the guy pacing back and forth, but that was all. After a moment I heard a door open and Julie's voice saying, "Okay, Jim. Thanks a lot."

"Did you find it?"

"No."

I felt like an idiot. I'd refused to go with her, so naturally she'd gotten someone else.

I heard footsteps and expected them to be going down. But suddenly I was facing the guy on his way up. That was when I remembered her telling me she knew the tenant above Laurie's apartment and that he'd probably help her get in.

He looked startled. I let out a

loud, "Well, hello there," and walked past him.

Julie turned around equally startled. "Tad!"

"You know this guy?" the upstairs tenant asked, taking a quick step toward me.

Julie nodded and introduced us. He shrugged his shoulders and started back upstairs. I fell into step beside Julie.

"What were you doing here?" she asked, her voice a little tremulous.

"I got worried about you."

She smiled. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it. I heard you tell your friend from upstairs you didn't find whatever you were looking for."

Julie nodded. "They're gone. All of the minutes."

I was relieved to hear it. "That's too bad," I said. "Are you going to give up now?"

"No, Tad. I intend to go right on fighting."

I waited until we reached the street before I took her by the shoulders and turned her around, forcing her to face me.

"Somebody tried to kill me tonight," I told her. "They tried because I know Laurie's death was no accident. If you don't start minding your own business, you might find yourself in the same position."

Julie looked at me for a long minute. "I'm not afraid, Tad."

"How far are we from where

you live?" I asked. "I want to talk to you."

"About four blocks."

I nodded.

We fell in step and I was careful to look both ways before we crossed any corners.

VIII

JULIE MITCHELL sat on the couch in her apartment and looked at me. I was sitting on the bed and she completely forgot to be nervous about it.

"Tad, what happened?"

I let out a deep breath. "I don't suppose it would do any good if I just asked you to take my advice and start thinking about the danger you're in?"

She shook her head. "What happened, Tad? I've a right to know."

I told her about the two cars, without mentioning that I'd recognized one of the cars as a Buick. If Marty Polizeo did drive a Buick, she was probably aware of it.

She looked both shaken and worried. "But why haven't you called the police?"

"What for? What proof have I got? A stranger interfered the night Laurie died. Even if I could identify him as Polizeo, what good would it do? He'd claim he was just trying to help. A couple of cars almost ran me down on a dark street near my hotel. Again—how do I prove intent? I happen to believe it's tied in with Laurie's death—with

whatever she was planning to tell you. But just my feeling that way about it doesn't mean the cops are going to buy it.

"I'm telling you because I want you to realize what you're up against. Honey, your little park just isn't worth it."

"It's not the park," she answered seriously, "it's allowing vicious criminals to do as they please."

I shook my head, wondering whether she was capable of understanding.

She looked at me curiously. "You were in the army, weren't you?"

"Yeah."

"What's it like?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "You get shot at. You shoot back. You're scared but you try not to think about it. Why?"

"I'm scared now."

"Then drop it. What you were looking for in her apartment has disappeared. Be grateful for that, and let it alone."

"Tad, don't you see? It's not the park. It's that something like that shouldn't be decided by fear. If you give them a park this month, what'll it be next month? Before long the people who can frighten other people will be running everything."

"Suit yourself. I still don't think the prospect of being run down in an alley is real to you."

"What are you going to do now, Tad?" she asked.

"I'm catching a plane for New York at noon tomorrow," I said, and stood up.

"Is it safe for you to go back to your hotel tonight?"

"I doubt it," I said. "But I'll stay on guard."

She hesitated. "You can stay here. On the couch," she added quickly.

I smiled. "I don't think I'll fit."

She looked from me to the couch then back again. "All right! You take the bed. I'll take the couch."

I didn't protest—just cleared off the petitions and park literature, kicked off my shoes and stretched out.

Julie looked at me for a long minute. "You wouldn't—?"

"What?"

"Well, I mean, I don't know you. You wouldn't—"

I smiled. "Look, I appreciate your letting me stay here. That means you don't have to worry about whether I would or wouldn't. I wouldn't, period."

She blushed. "Okay. Good night."

Julie flipped off the light.

"Good night," I said.

The streetlight outside cast a dim glow through the window and I could see her outlined in the shadows of the couch.

I closed my eyes and tried not to think about what she'd said. Okay, theoretically, she was right. The location of her damned park

should not be decided by fear. It still wasn't my fight. But—

"Julie!"

"What?"

Shut up, I kept telling myself. But what I told myself and what I said were two different things. "Look, I'll cancel the flight reservation tomorrow morning, and go to the police."

Suddenly she was beside the bed, smiling down at me. She leaned her head down and kissed me, gently. I returned the kiss, moving my arms around her back and pulling her down—when right at that moment the phone rang.

Before she could reach out and lift the receiver, I caught her wrist. "Maybe you'd better not answer it—unless you're expecting a call," I cautioned.

"It's probably Marion wanting to know if I found anything at Laurie's apartment," Julie said.

I let go of her wrist, and listened while she asked who it was. She sounded surprised, so I figured it couldn't be Marion.

"Well," she continued, "I'll—" She broke off, put her hand over the mouthpiece and looked at me. "It's Max Hogan. He wants to know if you're here—wants to talk to you. He says it's important. How come you know Max?"

I thought of asking her to tell him I wasn't with her, then let it go. In hesitating, she'd already answered his question. I took the re-

ceiver. "Max? Yeah, this is Tad."

"You're in serious trouble, Tad," he said. "But I think I can help you. Could you meet me at my office right away—alone?"

It was phoney. It was as phoney as hell. The day Max Hogan stuck his neck out for any other human being would never arrive. But I told him I'd be there as soon as I could, and hung up.

Julie was watching me. "Where did you meet Max?"

"We were in the army together."

"Is he a friend?"

"I suppose so—in a way," I said. "As much of a friend as Max could ever be to anybody. Except that just now he was lying to me. There's something very strange going on. I don't think he'd set me up, but that's what it sounded like. He wants me to meet him at his office."

"You're not going—"

"No. And I'm not waiting until tomorrow to get in touch with the police."

"Max and Marty are friends," she said. "Didn't you know that?"

I had begun to suspect it, and suddenly a lot of things started making sense!

Max had been hoping I'd leave town as soon as his debt to me had been paid in full—before I would have had a chance to see Marty again and recognize him.

And something else was wrong—something I couldn't quite pinpoint. Max had asked me to meet

him at his office alone. Yeah, that was it—*alone*. He'd called me at Julie's, probably figuring I'd already told her everything. He wouldn't want just me. He'd have to get Julie too. He'd have to silence us both.

And if he knew about the earlier attempt to kill me, he also knew I'd be unlikely to keep the appointment I'd made with him. The phone call had been to make sure both of us were here and delude me into thinking he was waiting for me at his office.

Like hell he was! Whatever he had in mind, it was planned for this apartment—

I grabbed the phone and dialed the operator. "Get me the police. This is an emergency."

When the desk sergeant at the precinct station came on the line I told him I'd witnessed a murder and someone was trying to kill me. I gave him my name and Julie's address, and he said they'd send someone right over.

I hung up and glanced at my watch. Yeah, it would probably be okay now. How long would it take? Three minutes? Five? The guy I'd talked to would probably contact some kind of central dispatcher. From there, the timing would depend on how close a patrol car happened to be.

"Tad, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said, to reassure her. "Is that door locked?"

"I think so. It has a snap lock.



Sometimes it doesn't catch unless you slam it."

Julie hardly finished the sentence before she was halfway across the room, her hand on the doorknob, ready to slam it.

"Hold it," I yelled.

IX

MY WARNING CAME too late. Julie had the door wide open, and I found myself staring back at Max Hogan. He was carrying a gun complete with silencer, and it was aimed at Julie.

Hogan flipped on the overhead light and closed the door behind

him. "Tad, I'm sorry," he said. "I told you to get out of town, god-damnit." He looked at Julie and motioned towards the door with the gun. "Get your purse. Come on." Then he was looking at me. "You too. Hurry up."

I got off the bed, slowly, taking my time putting my shoes back on again. How long ago had I called the police? A minute—maybe two.

"Come on, Max, what the hell is this?" I said to gain more time.

"I'm sorry, Tad, it had to be this way" Max Hogan repeated. "You shouldn't have said you'd meet me at the office. I knew you wouldn't go out again and when you lied, I knew you were suspicious. You probably called the cops. I'll kill you both right now if I have to. Now *move*."

I hesitated, then motioned to Julie to do as he said, and a moment later we were descending the stairs to the street, with Max right behind us.

His face was white and his hands were trembling.

Just as we reached the street a squad car pulled up. Julie caught her breath and I could feel my neck muscles tighten. I could also feel the outline of Max's body against mine, the gun hard in my ribs.

"Take it easy," he whispered. "I've got nothing to lose. I just killed Marty Polizeo."

The doors of the police car opened and four cops headed into

the building. There was no way I could have caught their attention and signaled to them without ending up dead.

Max pushed us towards a maroon Chevy parked on the other side of the street. He tossed me the keys, and motioned us into the front seat. He climbed into the back, his gun held steady.

I inserted a key into the ignition lock and started the motor. "Now what?" I asked.

"Straight ahead. There's a stretch of woods about half a mile out of town. A regular lover's lane. You two were necking, and somebody tried to rob you. You put up a fight. Both of you got shot. Start driving."

My mouth was dry and my hands on the steering wheel were skiddy with sweat. "What about Polizeo?"

"He kept pushing me," Max said. "First he wanted to kill Laurie Hunter. He had it all set up when that drunk came along. It still would have worked if the drunk hadn't stepped in. She'd gotten her hands on those damn CPC minutes and wouldn't let go. Marty had a tap on her phone, and when she called Julie that night he knew she'd found out. About ten years ago, his father died and it was mentioned at a CPC meeting that he'd inherited a lot of property on Elm Street."

"*Elm Street!*" said Julie. "Don't you mean Kane Square?"

"Who the hell cares about Kane Square? We never cared *where* you put that damn park just as long as it wasn't Elm Street. Kane Square was simply a dodge so nobody would think any farther—and nobody did."

"What's the matter with Elm Street?" she asked, and I couldn't help feeling the same way I'd felt back in her apartment. It wasn't completely real to her. Hell, she even seemed pleased that he was willing to talk about it.

Max sounded tired and tense. "If the city bought the Elm Street property, they'd have to appraise the buildings. And after they appraised them, they'd discover that over three hundred thousand dollars in FHA property-improvement loans never improved that property. It was me and Marty.

"The loans were based on a lot of phoney estimates, and we plowed the money back into buying more buildings—all under the name of ABCO Reality. In another few years we could have resold everything at a profit, and pulled out with enough to live on for the rest of our lives. But if we'd got caught misusing FHA funds, we could have gotten twenty years. The Kane Square dodge is going to work. They'll settle on a compromise location and that maniac Wegman will get the idea she's won."

"What about Polizeo?" I wanted to know.

"Suicide—with this gun. That's why I had nothing to lose by killing you if the cops stopped me before I returned it to his apartment."

"You're nuts," I said. "The cops can match the bullets."

"Why should they? What's to tie your death to his? And even if they did, Marty was my friend. They'd never suspect me."

X

WE REACHED THE edge of town, and kept going for about fifteen minutes. It was insane. If Julie hadn't been with me, I could have taken a chance on jumping him. I knew that if I didn't both of us would die anyway, but there are some risks you can't bring yourself to take.

"Turn here." His voice was sharp.

I turned, swinging hard on the wheel. Julie looked angry, and I figured maybe it still wasn't real to her. Okay—maybe she was lucky.

Keep him talking, I thought. Stall. "What about Salzman?" I asked. "Was he in on it?"

"Hell no," Max said. "He just likes to keep peace between the two factions. He suggested the compromise location because Marty told him he knew he'd lost Kane Square but could never save face if it wound up on Elm Street."

"The minutes were missing from Laurie's apartment." I said.

He'd said it was a lover's lane. Maybe there'd be another car there.

"Yeah—that was Salzman. Marty told him the new secretary needed them, so he used his connections to cut the red tape. He handed them over to Marty, all nice and legal. He had no idea there was anything in them."

Max's voice rose sharply again. "Stop here!"

I stopped, letting out a deep breath. "How are we supposed to have gotten here?" I asked.

"You hitched a ride or got off the bus. Then you walked the rest of the distance. Some of them do it that way . . . Get out!"

We got out. The lane was deserted and I could hear the crickets chirping.

Max backed away and raised the gun. The light from the moon was so bright that it brought his face into sharp relief. He was very pale, and his lips were compressed. "Tad, I'm sorry. Toss me your wallet and your watch—anything of value that a thief might take."

I looked at him for a long minute. "I suppose the joke is on me. I could have walked away from you in Korea. You'd be dead now."

"I'm sorry." His voice cracked. "I got you the money, and told you to get out of town. Now toss me your wallet."

I pulled the wallet out of my

pocket and tossed it on the ground in front of him. I was slipping off my watch when Julie stepped in front of me, her green eyes blazing.

Her voice was unsparing in its contempt. "You've sunk to the level of a vicious criminal who'll stop at nothing to get what he wants. How can you go on living with yourself? How can you sink that low, and still think of yourself as a man? You were in the army. What were you fighting for?"

Max looked startled and took a slow step backwards. Julie kept moving towards him and I held my breath. I was still too far away to jump him—unless she could manage to get just a little closer.

I was prepared to risk it, but I held back. It was all a matter of timing. Any sudden move on my part, and his gun would go off. I was sure of that. I suppose if he'd been used to killing, it would have been different. But even in the services he'd been a lousy marksman.

"You were fighting so that people like you could never take over," Julie went on relentlessly. "You want to run things through fear. But what happens when somebody bigger than you comes along—somebody who makes you afraid?"

I saw it coming. Max's lips tightened and his hand smashed against her face, knocking her to the ground.

I took a flying leap and heard a muffled report as the silenced gun went off. Then something warm and wet was trickling down my face. But at least I had a solid grip on Max Hogan.

My fist smashed into his face and I felt the crunch of breaking bones. Then Julie was holding the gun and Max was fighting me off, but too feebly to give me any concern.

Julie's voice seemed to be coming from one hell of a long way off and it wasn't until she shoved me completely off-balance that I realized Max was unconscious and I'd continued hitting him long after he'd blacked out.

She helped me to my feet and handed me the gun.

"Your head's bleeding," she said quietly.

"Yeah."

She looked sick. "I never saw so much blood. He was really going to kill us."

"Did you think he was kidding?"

"I don't know what I thought."

"Don't worry about it," I said, giving her shoulder a pat. I leaned down and checked Max Hogan's pulse. Yeah, he was still alive. All

I had to do now was drive him to the nearest phone and call the cops.

I stood up and looked at Julie. She'd changed, and in a way, I was sorry. I'd liked my little Joan d'Arc in bermudas.

I tied my handkerchief around my head; the bleeding was subsiding. I used his belt to tie Max's arms behind him and we put him in the back seat. Then Julie and I got into the front and she started driving.

"You know," she said seriously, "that's the trouble with summer. People who are ordinarily reasonably nice do things that are absolutely crazy. I mean, I've known Max Hogan for years. All right. Maybe he was never exactly completely honest. But at least he didn't go around killing people. You were the best friend he had."

I smiled. No, she hadn't changed.

I thought of New York—and taking Julie with me. It would be no problem at all to make it permanent and legal.

Our eyes met and we were silent for a moment. Then her hand closed over mine and I knew it would be okay with her.

A New MIKE SHAYNE Novelet Next Month

The Poisoned Dart



*There was no flaw at all in the
killer's thinking . . . up to a point.*

by JACK KENT

I AWOKE FROM a deep sleep, and stared up at the ceiling of my room for a moment with no clear awareness of where I was. Then the events of the night before came rushing back, and I felt inordinately proud of myself.

The night before I had committed the perfect murder. Motiveless, clueless and untraceable.

During the day the newspapers would be on the streets with the news that Samuel Adamson, well-known mystery writer, had died of heart failure during the night. And

that was how the reading public would view the tragedy, and dismiss it with an impersonal kind of sadness.

I had murdered him, but nobody would ever know.

I first met Samuel Adamson when he came to the museum where, for the past five years, I had been an assistant curator of ethnology. There is a section, one of the most interesting, devoted to the pygmy tribes who live deep in the Congo. I am in complete charge.

Adamson came in one morning,

introduced himself, and informed me that he was writing a mystery novel with a Congo background. He had a number of questions to ask, for he had never been in Africa. We talked for half an hour or so, and he seemed grateful for the assistance I was able to give him.

Later, he sent me a copy of the book and an invitation to a cocktail party the publishers were giving on the day of its publication.

And that was how our acquaintance started. We were never really friends, for I disliked his casual air, and his nonchalance about his success. But my dislike did not go beyond an underlying distaste, prompted to some extent by a mild kind of envy.

He visited the museum again in search of information, three or four times in all. It was after the second visit that he suggested I visit him some evening and have a drink with him.

He lived pleasantly by himself in a large, rambling old house in Flushing. A daily maid did all the necessary work, went home at four, and had never seen me.

After a drink or two Adamson was inclined to be loquacious. He liked talking about his books and stories, and one subject in particular—the perfect murder—seemed to have an almost morbid fascination for him. In his view there could be no perfect murder. Somewhere, somehow, he insisted, all murderers trip themselves up by overlooking

some seemingly insignificant detail. He had never succeeded in writing a perfect murder story because he had always foreseen the oversight that would lead to the killer's undoing.

His insistence on arguing about this was rather irritating. I took the opposite view. Somewhere there must be a man clever enough to plan and execute a murder without making even a small mistake.

Adamson's answer to that was characteristic of him. There might be such a man, but he would be too shrewd to resort to murder.

As a bachelor, living alone in a tiny apartment and spending most of my evenings with books, I had plenty of time to think. Despite my better judgment and almost subconsciously at first, I kept turning over what Adamson had said in my mind, until it became a definite, impossible-to-resist challenge.

Then, one morning, while I was explaining to a gathering of visiting schoolboys exactly how expert the pygmies were in disposing of their enemies by stealth, my educational talk started a train of thought that persisted all afternoon.

That evening at home I worked the whole thing out in detail. I was seeing Adamson again in a week's time, but I was almost tempted to go to the phone and ask to see him immediately.

I managed to restrain my impatience and we met as originally planned. After the second whisky-

and-soda I told him I had thought of the perfect murder.

Adamson laughed, filled his glass again and indicated with a nod that he was most interested.

I put my glass down and leaned forward.

"Suppose a man in my position decided to commit murder," I said. "The means are at my disposal. I am in sole charge of the African ethnological section, and I'm sure you're familiar with the poisoned darts used by the pygmies. They are small things, only a few inches long, made to be shot through blow-pipes. We even have samples of the poison itself at the museum. The phials are under lock and key, of course, but I have access to them. I could get at them, and replace them without anyone finding out."

"Go on," he said, replenishing his drink for the fourth time.

"Having arranged a meeting with the man I intend to kill, I dip the point of the dart in the poison. It will dry, but the poison will not lose its strength for several hours."

I paused an instant, then went on quickly. "We meet and talk. When I get up to go, we shake hands. I've concealed the dart between my fingers and I inflict the tiniest of scratches on his palm. If he notices the slight pin-prick sensation he'll think I've merely scratched his hand with the ring I'll be wearing.

"It will be a hearty handclasp. During the night he dies in his sleep. In the morning I replace the poison

and the dart, and—" I paused and looked at him. "You see how simple it would be."

Adamson had closed his eyes. He said: "Wouldn't the cause of death be traceable to the poison?"

I shook my head. "It kills in five or six hours. A heart attack would produce the same post-mortem appearances. It will be taken for granted that he died in his sleep from a coronary occlusion."

Adamson sat there without even opening his eyes. "Ingenious," he acknowledged. "But I'll guarantee if I gave it a little serious thought I could find the slip you would make in less than half an hour."

Watching him sitting there, his eyes closed, so utterly confident, made me decide to murder him. Not from hate or even dislike. Not even because I wanted to. I simply had to prove that I wasn't the fool he thought me.

He was speaking again, interrupting my thoughts. "Those darts," he said. "They sound fascinating. I'd like to see one. Could I?"

"Of course," I said quickly. "I'll bring one here. Tomorrow night, if you like!"

He sat up, nodded and reached for the bottle. "Have another drink?"

It was easy to get the dart and the poison, and out of the museum. Just before leaving my apartment I took the dart from its case, dipped the point in the poison, replaced it and put the case in my pocket.

On the way to his home in the subway I felt nothing. To me this was simply a challenging experiment, something to be proved by a practical demonstration.

Adamson let me in. As I followed him down the hall I told myself that nothing could make the circumstances more perfect. Living alone as I did, no one knew how often I went out and returned. Obviously, too, no one knew Adamson was expecting a visitor.

I declined his offer of a drink and as he poured himself one I took out the little case, saying, "I won't stay long. I have a meeting to attend."

He opened the case and took out the dart. He held it carefully between his finger and thumb and eyed it with interest.

"Devilish," he finally said. "Just looking at it gives me the creeps." He handed it back. "And if I were scratched by that I would die?"

I laughed. "Not unless it had poison on it."

"Which it hasn't, of course," he said smiling.

"Naturally," I said.

Adamson reached for it again, and held it poised over the back of his hand.

"The tiniest of scratches," I said. "You needn't even draw blood." I reached over, took his wrist, and moved his hand sufficiently for the point of the dart to scratch him slightly. "Like that," I said. "Simple, isn't it?"

He looked at his hand, laughed, and gave me the dart.

"Here, put it away."

I put it away carefully, looked at my watch and apologized for having to run away. He came with me to the door and the last impression I had of him was a little wave of his hand.

I was having breakfast early next morning when someone knocked on the door. Rather surprised, I opened it. The two men standing there identified themselves as detectives.

As soon as they were in the room one of them remained by the door, and the other, carrying a briefcase, brushed past me. He stopped by the sideboard and looked at the tiny bottle of poison and the case containing the dart. I hadn't had a chance to return them to the museum.

He picked up the case, and looked inside without touching the dart. Calmly he put both the case and the bottle in his briefcase.

"Can you tell me what this is all about?" I asked.

The one with the briefcase nodded. "A Mr. Samuel Adamson died last night in his library. He was sitting in his chair at his desk. His maid discovered him. She telephoned a doctor who thought at first that he'd had a heart attack. But when he checked the room he decided to phone the police."

I sat down slowly.

"Mr. Adamson had just finished writing a short story," the detective with the briefcase said. "It was on his desk. It was a very interesting story about a writer like himself who had a most enlightening discussion with a museum curator like you."

I moved my hand. "Well?" I asked.

The detective with the briefcase said, quietly, "There was a letter in the typewriter—addressed to you. He said he hoped you'd forgive him for stealing *your* story without changing a line. He said he was sorry for any doubts he had expressed, for he was sure now that you had committed a perfect murder."

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS

— Next Month's Headliners

DRINK UP—AND DIE! by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne tangles in a homicide case in Miami Beach with his old enemy Peter Painter.

THE TERRIBLE TWINS by NORMAN ANTHONY

A New Long Suspense Story

MR. HARBAND'S GIRLS by WILLIAM VANCE

HIS NUMBER CAME UP DEATH by ALSON J. SMITH

WHERE THE LINES MEET by WALTER DALLAS

Syd Hoff is more than just a first-magnitude cartoonist, known wherever sophisticated people gather. One doesn't have to be a regular reader of "The New Yorker" to enjoy a Hoff cartoon, or even a sophisticated person. For Hoff's appeal is universal. Just mention his name and you'll get: "Oh, those extraordinary people!" Yes . . . Hoff's people are extraordinary and here are some of them in a short story! And a Hoff drawing, made especially for MSMM!



REACH FOR A STAR

by SYD HOFF

**The girl on the screen was out of
Alan's reach. But he reached anyway.**

IN THE DARKENED balcony of a small neighborhood theatre love came to Alan Fellows. His hungry eyes followed the girl on the screen as they had never followed any other girl, on the screen or anywhere, and the picture wasn't half over when he realized what had happened to him: he couldn't live without Monica Newberry.

"Oh, if you were only mine," he dreamed, as the goddess glided through her scenes. "I would make you happier than any of those big lummoX actors . . ."

"Man, how would you like to . . ." snickered the fellow next to

him, leaning over and sucking in his breath sensually. Alan elbowed him away savagely.

Nat cringed back in his own seat, puzzled. Usually it was Alan who made the wise cracks about the stars and how he'd like to change places with Rock Hudson or any of those guys for just five minutes. What the hell's come over him all of a sudden, Nat wondered, his feelings hurt, and went back to munching on his popcorn and studying the big screen himself.

Now it was night and Monica prepared for bed, brushing her golden tresses and singing of a love

© 1963, by Syd Hoff

far away, and perhaps occupied elsewhere. Alan's pulse raced. It raced even faster as a sinister shape emerged from the shadows in the garden below, glanced carefully about, and started to pull himself up the wall. Monica brushed and sang on, oblivious.

Too late she glanced over her head in the mirror and saw the intruder. The song died on her lips as she reacted frantically for a gun, found it and started firing. He fell, but toward her, his fingers finding the long white throat.

"If I can't have you, none shall," he breathed, dragging her to the floor. "We shall be together in Death."

"C'mon," said Alan suddenly, getting to his feet.

"It ain't over yet," Nat protested, but he followed his friend up the aisle, trying to look back over his shoulder and see the end.

They stopped for coffee and a hamburger.

"Hello, handsome," smiled the cashier.

Alan paid his check and went out.

"What's wrong with him tonight?" the girl asked.

Nat shrugged and ran out after his friend. "Anything else you wanna do?"

"Like what?"

"Like girls."

"Girls? There's only one girl for me," said Alan.

He left Nat standing there

scratching his head, and went home to think about her.

He thought far into the night. "Oh, if you were only mine. I could make you so happy . . . so happy . . ."

The following evening Alan ducked Nat and went to see Monica again.

"If I can't have you, none shall."

He knew just when the words would be said.

Alan went every night to the small neighborhood theatre and when the pictures finished its run there, he followed it across town and continued seeing it.

At the end of the second week he wrote Monica a letter in care of the company whose name appeared at the opening of the picture:

Dear Miss Newberry:

I have seen "Love Me! Love Me!" fourteen times and intend to go on seeing it.

May I hope to meet you some day in person?

Please tell me where and when.

Faithfully,

Alan Fellows

806 West 105th Street

New York, N.Y.

P.S. I am nineteen and a half, stand five feet nine in my stockinged feet and weigh 147 lbs.

In six weeks Alan had an answer. By that time the picture had moved out of the metropolitan

area and he was changing busses four times to get to see it.

Dear Fan:

If you will send 25¢ to cover the cost of mailing, we will be happy to send you an autographed photo of your favorite star.

*Yours truly,
Majestic Brand Films.*

Alan sent a quarter. He sent it with another letter:

Dear Miss Newberry:

Apparently my previous letter did not reach you personally.

I have now seen "Love Me! Love Me!" 58 times and find myself more eager than ever to get to know you, although I feel that I already know you pretty well just from seeing you on the screen.

Hoping to hear from you, I am

Faithfully,

Alan Fellows

806 West 105th Street

New York, N.Y.

P.S. If this letter is being read by a studio secretary, kindly forward.

P.P.S. I am enclosing the quarter for her photo.

Nat found him one evening waiting at a bus stop. "Where have you been? I've called you up a hundred times."

"I'm going steady," said Alan.

Nat whistled. "Do I know her?"

"Yeah, we met her together."

"Who is she?"

"Monica Newberry," said Alan.

"Oh, stop ribbing me," laughed Nat. Then he stopped laughing and stood staring after the bus as it rolled away.

"I've got two dolls," he phoned Alan one Saturday. "Please help me out. You can even have the nicer one. You can't say no. I've already told them."

Alan didn't care. He was in a terrible state. Monica's picture was nowhere to be seen. The autographed photo had arrived but it just wasn't enough.

They went to an amusement park. For a while Alan lost himself in the rides, throwing baseballs at a target, and eating cotton candy.

"It's been a lot of fun," he told Angela on her doorstep.

"I enjoyed it too," she said, and stood there waiting.

"Will I see you again?" she asked.

Alan looked away. "I'm sorry—really sorry. You see, there's someone else."

"Oh."

She ran upstairs and refused to tell her mother what was wrong.

A week later Alan called her. "I was wondering if you'd care to have dinner with me."

"How about that 'someone else'?"

There was silence for a full minute. Angela thought he had hung up. "She won't mind," he said finally.

They ate in a cheap restaurant. He looked rather ill, she thought.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have come," she said, stirring her coffee.

"I'm glad you did," he said, and hesitated. "I need you."

She blushed. "Are you finished with—her?"

His shoulders sagged. "No."

"Why not?"

"I can't," he said with difficulty.

She threw down her spoon. "Why do you need me if you already have a girl?"

He wouldn't explain.

"Please take me home," Angela said.

It was the last she saw of him.

A few days later Alan's boss called him up on the carpet.

"What's the matter with you lately?" he griped.

"Why do you ask that, sir?" Alan wanted to know.

"Your thoughts seem to be a million miles away."

"Three thousand miles away would be more correct," Alan wanted to say, thinking of California, and promised to do better.

He did do better until he heard of "Love Me! Love Me!" being shown as a re-run on a double feature and tried to catch it one day during his lunch hour.

"If I can't have you, none shall," went the sound track, and Alan rushed back to the office. But it was four o'clock by the time he got there and his boss fired him.

"I don't care," Alan said, emp-

tying his desk. "I'm going out to the Coast."

"Who have you got out there?" someone asked.

"My girl."

Nat nearly flipped when he heard.

"You must be off your head," he said. "Who are you to reach for a star? Movie actresses are for guys like you and me to look at, not to touch."

He had never talked to Alan like that but someone had to do it.

Nat might as well have talked to himself.

When he was all through, there he was at Idlewild, waving goodbye. Once I had a friend and he went crazy, so goodbye friend, he told himself as the huge plane rolled out towards a runway.

Alan's mother was there, waving too. Let him go, she thought. All he's done for four months is sit in his room and stare at some movie actress's photo. Let him go out there and get it out of his system. Then he'll come home. (She hoped.)

At Los Angeles International Airport Alan rented a car and drove to a nearby motel. It was his first time on the Coast and he'd have to feel his way. All he had with him was \$280, his savings, and a knowledge of how to apply for unemployment insurance.

How did one go about contacting his favorite movie star? He called the studio.

"I'm sorry, Miss Newberry is shooting in Italy," they told him. "Maybe the Goldmark Agency can tell you when she's arriving back in California."

There was no hurry. Alan found "Love Me! Love Me!" playing on Western Avenue. Then he spent some time glaring at giggling women trying to fit their feet into Monica's footprints at Grauman's Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard.

"Get a map of the stars' homes," said an old lady on Sunset Boulevard.

Alan bought one and drove around the hills. But the only place in which he was interested was Monica's.

"Miss Newberry is expected back in about ten days," said the receptionist on the Strip, wondering what a kid like Alan wanted.

"I've seen her picture one hundred and fourteen times," Alan grinned.

"Are you an usher?"

"No."

"You mean you paid each time?" she asked incredulously, and sent for Mr. Goldmark.

The agent looked long and steady at Alan, and took the cigar out of his mouth.

"Come in to see me when Miss Newberry comes back," he said. "Maybe we can use you for some publicity."

Alan went out, elated.

"One meets all kinds of screwballs in this kind of business," said Mr. Goldmark.

Alan caught the picture four more times on Western Avenue, then followed it over to a theatre in Inglewood.

On a Friday while waiting for the box office to open in Long Beach, he picked up a paper and read about Monica flying in from Italy with her director.

"The pair are expected to marry over the weekend," the piece said.

Alan went into the theatre and sat there, but he hardly raised his eyes to the screen once.

It was dark when he parked his car about a block from Monica's house in Bel Air and slipped over the high concrete wall.

When he was sure nobody had seen him he emerged from the shadows and started pulling himself upward, upward. There was no sound in the night except Monica singing.

He swung into the room. Look, he wanted to say, my name is Alan Fellows. I've seen your picture 120 times and I love you. But Monica had swung away from the mirror, a gun in her hand blazing. His hand reached out for the long white throat he had seen so many times, pressing . . . pressing . . .

"If I can't have you, none shall," he said.

He wished there was time to say more.

the BODY

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

You can read the complete book-length novel *now*, for here, preceeding this generous concluding installment, is a long and detailed summary of what went before.



CARLA ANDREWS, a Hollywood script writer, has flown to Miami to attend her daughter's wedding to State Senator-Elect, William Greer. The daughter, Vicky, does not know that her father is an ex-convict whom her mother married before changing her name and achieving success in the film colony.

Carla has heard rumors that her husband has been killed in an armed robbery, but he turns up unexpectedly at the *Encanto Hotel* in Miami, and demands money. There is a struggle and she accidentally shoots him. She is terrified, and doesn't know what to do.

While in Hollywood she had collaborated with Brett Halliday

on some Mike Shayne television scripts, and suddenly she remembers that in the Shayne novels the redhead has been known to step a little outside the Law at times to see that justice is done.

She sits down and writes out a confession which reads like the hysterical self-accusation of a frightened girl and signs it with her daughter's name. Carla's purpose is to convince Shayne, when she has enlisted his aid, that her ex-convict husband, Al Donlin, found her daughter alone in the hotel suite awaiting her mother's arrival, threatened the girl with bodily harm and forced her to kill him in self-defense, without suspecting that the man was her own father.

She makes sure that Shayne will believe her story by placing a

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that CAME BACK

Shayne was appalled by the big, sinister hurdles that Murder kept putting in his path . . . when all he'd done was enter an obstacle race accompanied by a corpse.

PART THREE OF THREE GENEROUS INSTALLMENTS

newspaper cutting announcing her daughter's engagement in the slain man's jacket pocket. Then Carla telephones Shayne, tells him that they have a mutual friend, Brett Halliday, and appeals to him for help.

When Shayne arrives at the *Encanto* she shows him the forged confession and tells him that her daughter's entire future happiness is at stake. Should a young girl who has killed in self-defense have to live for the rest of her life with the terrible knowledge that she has slain her own father?

"Mike, you've got to help me. I'm desperate. I know it's asking a great deal. I've no right, really, to think that just because I'm a friend of Brett's you'll feel obligated to do more than you would ordinarily. But a mother doesn't hesitate to



ask more, to plead for more, than a woman who has only herself to consider."

Shayne is moved by her story, realizing how ugly a police inves-

tigation would be, and how disastrously it would affect Vicki's coming marriage. When Carla pleads with him to remove the body from the hotel suite, so that it will be found by the police a considerable distance from the *Encanto*, he agrees that the plan has merit.

Shayne is driving through Miami with Donlin's body in the trunk compartment of the car which the slain man had left in front of the hotel, a late model Ford, when an accidental collision with the drunken driver of another car results in a charge of reckless driving and an attempt to bribe a police officer in the performance of his duty.

Shayne is taken to police headquarters and booked on both charges. Donlin's body is still in the trunk compartment of the Ford and when the police discover that Donlin had been driving a *stolen* car, belonging to a certain Mr. Duclos, Shayne, in desperation, asks a young reporter to get in touch immediately with the redhead's old friend Tim Rourke, of the *Miami Daily News*.

"Tell him it's urgent and to get here as quickly as possible. You won't have to do any persuading."

Shayne is steeling himself for what he fears will be almost certain disaster when his luck takes a slight turn for the better. A detective who bears the redhead no ill

will decides that he can safely be released in his own custody.

"All right, Mike," the detective tells him. "I'd be a sap to believe any part of your story. But I don't think you'd steal a car and attempt to bribe a cop, and— well, if I'm making a mistake we'll know where to find you."

When Shayne walks out of police headquarters, he wastes no time in having a long and serious talk with Tim Rourke. He persuades Tim to help him recover the body. The rightful owner of the car has claimed it, and Shayne is sure that it won't be long before Duclos opens the trunk compartment and makes a gruesome discovery, if he has not already done so.

Shayne takes Tim almost completely into his confidence, but is careful to let him exercise his imagination a little as the narrative unfolds.

"I don't want you to get into trouble if you have to testify under oath in court," he tells the reporter.

Rourke bows to the inevitable and agrees to assist Shayne in an all-out attempt to recover the corpse.

They decide to pay the car's rightful owner a surprise visit. While Shayne waits in his car outside Duclos' home Tim interviews the man's wife. Mrs. Duclos has been in touch with her husband by phone, but isn't sure

just when he'll return from police headquarters with the car.

"He didn't say just when he'll be coming home," she tells Rourke.

While Tim is talking to Mrs. Duclos he notices a portrait in the living room. It is that of a mean-looking man whom Tim Rourke is almost sure he has seen somewhere before. He has the feeling that the man is a criminal, wanted by the police, but he can't pin it down in a more definite way in his mind. The man is Mrs. Duclos' brother.

While Mrs. Duclos is out of the room Tim quickly appropriates the photograph, and leaves the house without letting her suspect that he has gathered some information which he is sure will be of great interest to Shayne. But when he returns to Shayne's car and shows the redhead the photograph he feels a little let down. Shayne refuses to be impressed and shakes his head skeptically.

"You say you've seen him before and you're almost sure he has a criminal record. But you're just guessing, Tim. You can't place very much reliance on a vague hunch. Your memory may be leading you astray. . . ."

Rourke knows that he can't be sure. But he remembers something else that Duclos' wife has told him about her brother. The man has behaved for years like a man wanted by the police, visiting her



and her husband only occasionally, and—

The revelation, when it comes, is staggering. By a process of shrewd deduction, Mike Shayne and Tim Rourke fill in the gaps, and come to the conclusion that the body in Duclos' Ford is that of the man in the photograph—Al Donlin! The fact that he is Duclos' brother-in-law would explain how he was able to borrow the Ford and leave it parked in front of the *Encanto Hotel* in his ill-fated attempt to blackmail his ex-wife, Carla Andrews.

Another revelation, almost equally startling, awaits Shayne when he gets home. He finds Carla Andrews in his hotel room, distraught and on the verge of hysteria. She tells Shayne that she has just had a phone call from a total stranger, who appeared to know that Al Donlin had been to see her.

The man had asked: "What have you done to Al?" And had then demanded ten thousand dol-

lars in cash in exchange for something that Donlin had left with him for safe-keeping.

"I've no idea what he was talking about," Carla tells Shayne. "But I've got to raise that money, and see that he gets it. Oh, I know it's blackmail—and horrible. But Vicki's happiness is the only thing that matters. If he does know about Al's visit and what happened when he found Vicki alone— Don't you see, Mike? We've got to keep him quiet. I'll give you one thousand dollars and write you out an I.O.U. for the other nine thousand. You must raise nine thousand tonight!"

Shayne manages to calm her down and agrees to meet the unknown blackmailer. But they'll have to wait for another phone call. When it comes Shayne recognizes the man's voice as that of Duclos, whom he met briefly at police headquarters.

"All right," Shayne tells Carla. "Try not to worry and keep this from Vicki. I've agreed to meet him. Leave everything to me now. And don't worry about the nine thousand dollars. I'll have it with me when I keep that appointment."

(Third Installment Starts Here)

XIII

TIMOTHY ROURKE was slouched back comfortably on a sagging sofa in the disordered sitting room

of his bachelor apartment when Mike Shayne entered ten minutes later. He had a highball glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other, and he grinned cheerfully at the detective and waved toward a bottle of bourbon and another glass on a table beside him.

"I'm clean out of cognac," he said, but this isn't bad stuff in a pinch."

Shayne said, "I'll skip the drink, Tim. What's the story on our dead man?"

Rourke pointed proudly to a folded newspaper on a chair under a lighted reading map. "Read it for yourself in the Montgomery paper: I picked up that copy after checking out a shorter version we ran on Friday from the wire report. We didn't use that picture. But I'd seen it when it came in and that's how I recognized it in the Duclos house."

Shayne sank into the chair and unfolded the Montgomery paper to a front page story headlined: BLOODY BANK ROBBERY.

Beneath was a two-column cut showing the head and shoulders of the dead man he had last seen in the trunk of a Ford car. It was captioned: *Killer Believed Drowned.*

The story was datelined Eureka, Alabama, and dated the previous Thursday. The lead paragraph read:

Late today the sun laden somnolence of this peaceful farming

community was shattered by blazing guns and bloodshed which erupted in the wake of the armed robbery of Eureka's only bank.

Shayne laid the paper aside and reached for a cigarette. "Why don't you give me the facts, Tim, and save me the trouble of wading through the literary effusions of a small-town reporter?"

Rourke grinned widely. "Don't blame the guy. He doesn't often get a chance to see his immortal prose spread over the front page of a big city daily. Here it is in a Rourkian nutshell, not quite as I'd actually write it, of course.

"Just before closing time two guys walked into the only bank on Eureka's Main Street, population two thousand, where there were half a dozen customers. They got in line and waited until the guard locked the front door and drew the shades on the windows. Then they pulled guns and announced it was a stick-up. They made everybody lie flat on the floor, including the single guard whose gun they lifted.

"All except one teller, a young fellow named Harvey Giles. They handed him a croker sack and ordered him to fill it with all the big bills available. He was scared stiff and did so, gathering up about forty thousand according to a later estimate. Then they ordered Giles to carry the sack out of the bank in front of them, telling the others that if anybody

moved or turned in an alarm they'd shoot their hostage.

"The whole deal went off like clockwork, and they went out the front door and started across the street toward a getaway car at the curb with a woman driver behind the wheel and the motor turning over.

"They evidently kept their guns out of sight and no one paid any attention until they were almost to the car. Then a reckless vice-president came running out the door of the bank waving a Banker's Special he had grabbed up, and started shooting. One of them shot back . . . our friend Al there, according to the report . . . and killed the V.P.

"Then they jerked open the front door of the car and shoved the teller inside, and threw the money bag in the back seat and started to jump in themselves when . . . whoosh! Away went the getaway car down the street with the money and Harvey Giles inside.

"By that time the bank alarm was sounding off and citizens were running for guns. The two bandits grabbed a parked car and took off in the same direction as the money car on the highway leading to Montgomery, about twenty miles away.

"It didn't take long for a deputy sheriff to get himself organized. He took off after them on an eighty-mile-an-hour chase that

lasted about five miles—until the lead car failed to straighten out on a curve leading to a bridge over the Eureka River. The car went plunging through the guard rail and about forty feet down a steep embankment into the flood-swollen stream. There was at least ten feet of fast water, and by the time the deputy got stopped and back to the scene the car was out of sight. They recovered it later that evening a few hundred feet downstream with nobody inside.

“Nobody that saw it believes either of the robbers could have survived, and it’s generally expected that their bodies will be found miles away from the scene.”

“But one of them, at least, didn’t drown.” Shayne gestured toward the picture.

“That’s right. And you and I are the only ones who know that, Mike. He’s Al Newman, by the way. His partner in the robbery hasn’t been identified. Al was recognized in the bank as a character who had been shackled up in a motel on the outside of town for a week with the woman who drove the getaway car. They found that picture of him in the motel room. They were both complete strangers in town, apparently spent a week casing the bank job before pulling it off.”

“What about the money and the bank teller?”

“Poor Harvey Giles. He was

picked up on a lonely side road about dark that same night, all bruised up and practically incoherent. As that paper went to press he had told a garbled story about the woman holding a gun on him while she drove away like a bat out of hell, circling off the main highway onto side roads, and finally stopping to tie him up and leave him miles from anywhere. He managed to get loose and make it to the road where he was found.

“The car was found late that night on the outskirts of Montgomery, but the woman and the money had vanished. They’re still vanished, so far as any report we’ve had here shows.” Rourke stopped talking and took a long drink from his highball, his sunken eyes glittering and bright.

“So where does that leave us, Mike?”

“I’ll be goddamned if I know at this point. I think I will have a drink after all.”

Shayne got up and poured bourbon into the glass on the table, carried it out to Rourke’s kitchenette to get ice and add some water to it. He came back, sipping it and grimacing.

Studying his face carefully, Rourke asked, “Does any of this throw any light on the story you haven’t told me about tonight?”

“I don’t see how it does,” Shayne told him moodily. “It all seems to fit in, more or less. Al



Newman's real name is probably Al Donlin . . . for whatever that's worth. An ex-con who's been in and out of trouble all his life. It explains why he turned up in Miami desperate for money and went to his sister's house. If you didn't run his picture in the local paper it's perfectly possible that Mr. and Mrs. Duclos didn't know anything about his present trouble. Or he may have told Duclos . . . at least hinted he was hot. That would explain why Duclos didn't want to admit loaning him his car . . . if he did loan it to him to drive to the Encanto."

"What about your . . . friend? Carla, you said her name is."

"Brett's friend," Shayne corrected him. "No reason for her to know about this either, I guess." He paused, sipping his drink and pondering the problem.

"There's been another development since I saw you. She was waiting at my place when I got home. Frightened half out of her wits. She had a telephone call, soon after that newscast which she hadn't even heard. Some guy who was a complete stranger to her appeared to know that Al had been to see her tonight. He demanded to know what she and I had done with Al, and then demanded ten thousand bucks—in cash tonight—for which he offered to sell her something which he claimed Al had given him for safe-keeping before he went to see her."

"What kind of a something?"

"She insists she hasn't any idea what he was talking about. Can't even guess. But he is in a position to put her and her daughter on the spot in connection with Al's death, and she's frantic to pay him the money to keep his mouth shut."

Shayne looked at his watch and added grimly, "I'm on my way to make the pay-off in about twenty minutes."

"You're passing over ten grand?" asked Rourke incredulously.

Shayne grinned wolfishly. "Not quite that much. She had only a thousand in cash that she'd brought from California for expenses. She gave me that, and her IOU for the balance. I'm supposed to be picking it up from you right now."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I'm not sure," Shayne said cautiously. "I want to talk to the guy . . . try to find out what Al left with him for safekeeping that he thinks is worth ten thousand."

"Do you think it could be the other guy in the bank robbery?" asked Rourke eagerly. "If Al wasn't drowned in the river, maybe the other one wasn't either."

Shayne said doubtfully; "Could be." He tossed off the rest of his drink with a grimace.

Rourke's telephone rang. The reporter reached out a long arm and scooped it up. He said, "Rourke," and listened, twisting his head to nestle the receiver between his ear and shoulder while he got notebook and pencil from his pocket and began jotting down notes, mumbling, "Yeh," and "I got it," now and then.

Finally he said, "Thanks for calling me, Joe. It may be damned important. He hung up and shook his head at the detective who had gotten up and was preparing to leave.

"You got to hear this, Mike. A follow-up on the Alabama bank robbery. Just came over the wire and one of the boys at the office

knew I was checking on it tonight, and called me. Remember the bank teller they took for a hostage? Harvey Giles. He's been murdered."

Shayne sank back into his chair and said, "Give it to me fast."

"Body was discovered in his rooming house tonight. He'd been dead at least twelve hours. Beaten to death . . . after being brutally tortured from all available evidence. A real professional job." Rourke glanced down at his notes, compressing his lips. "Several fingernails torn out by the roots. Cigarette burns around his eyes and in his ears."

"Do they tie it in with the bank robbery?"

"Only by guess and by inference. No other motive known. Seems that Harvey Giles was a pretty innocuous sort. Young bachelor. Model citizen. Pillar of the church and the community. Teller of the bank at twenty-six, and probably drawing down a fat salary of four thousand bucks a year."

"Let's see . . . what was the time-table? On the robbery and then this killing."

"Well, the bank job was pulled Thursday afternoon. Giles turned up Thursday night a little the worse for wear." Rourke glanced at his notes again. "He came to work at the bank Friday morning, and they sent him home at noon . . . told him to take a long

week-end rest and come back to work Monday morning. Quite a local hero, I guess. He lived alone apparently. Yesterday was Saturday, and no one missed him. Until along in the evening when his landlady realized he hadn't shown up all day and went to his room and knocked on the door without getting any response. They broke the door down finally, and found him there."

"Dead for twelve hours or more," muttered Shayne. "That means the job was done on him some time Friday night."

"That's right. What do you make of it, Mike?"

"Right now, I don't know enough to make anything out of it," Shayne confessed wryly. "The woman driver of the getaway car vanished with the bank loot Thursday afternoon after ditching him in a deserted spot. Al Newman and a pal disappear in a river Thursday afternoon, supposedly drowned. Then we have Al turning up in Miami Saturday and holing up at his sister's house . . . discovering from a story on the society page of your paper that his wife and daughter are in town at the Encanto Hotel."

"For the first time, perhaps, he discovers that his wife whom he deserted long ago is a Hollywood script writer with money in the bank . . . and the daughter whom he has never seen is engaged to marry a recently elected

State Senator. So Al goes calling."

Shayne stopped and frowned. "Thus far, it all fits together. He's on the lam and hiding out from the law. Probably broke. He could expect Carla to give him a stake in order to keep him out of her hair and see that the wedding isn't disrupted."

"But things go wrong at the Encanto, and he walks in on Vicky before her mother gets here from Hollywood, and he ends up with a row of twenty-five bullets in his belly."

"All this makes sense, Tim. But what about the telephone call Carla got? What in hell did Al have in his possession that someone else now thinks is worth ten grand to Carla?"

"Hasn't she any idea?"

Shayne shook his head. "She says not." He glanced at his watch. "That's what I intend to find out in about ten minutes when I'm due to meet the guy."

"Whereabouts, Mike?"

Without rancor, Shayne said, "None of your goddamned business, Tim. I can handle it without the Press being present." He got up slowly, a preoccupied expression on his face, ragged red eyebrows drawing low beneath his ridged forehead.

"I don't know how things will work out, Tim. But I suggest you remain partially sober, and I may dump a front-page story in your lap. Be in the lobby of the Encan-

to Hotel thirty minutes from now," he said flatly.

"Just *be* there, Tim. I don't know how things will work out. Wait in the lobby for half an hour, and if I don't show up you come back and go to bed like a good little boy. Forget all this stuff tonight."

Shayne got up for the second time and moved decisively toward the door. "Okay?"

In a troubled voice, Rourke said, "Okay. But, Mike. Do you know what you're walking into?"

With his hand on the doorknob, Mike Shayne turned and grinned delightedly at his old friend. "Hell no. What would be the fun of living if you *knew* what was going to happen? Be seeing you . . . some time."

He went out and pulled the door firmly shut behind him.

XIV

THE MOON AND THE stars were bright in the tropical sky as Mike Shayne drove north on Biscayne Boulevard to keep his rendezvous with George Duclos. He wasn't exactly acquainted with 64th Terrace, but knew it must be one of the short streets between the boulevard and the bay, either north or south of 64th Street. The section was not closely built-up, and at this time of night the dead-end street should be completely deserted, a perfect spot for the meet-

ing that had been agreed upon.

As he drove, Shayne went over and over in his mind the information that he had just picked up from the *News* reporter. It didn't give him much of a clue as to what to expect when he met Duclos who expected him to turn over ten thousand in cash for *something* which had belonged to the dead man.

Again, he wondered if Duclos was aware that Al was dead. About the only way he could know that was for him to have discovered the body of his brother-in-law in the trunk of his car.

Would Duclos have remained quiet if he had made that discovery? Certainly, he would have got rid of it fast. In that case the real object of Shayne's trip to 64th Terrace was probably worthless. If the body was already safely disposed of, there was no need to bother further with Duclos or his Ford. At this point, Shayne wasn't particularly worried about Duclos going to the police. Not if he had already found the body and gotten rid of it. That put him in just as deep as Shayne.

On the other hand, Duclos might not have the slightest idea what had happened to the bank robber and simply be taking a chance on picking up a wad of cash by selling something that belonged to Al. If he did know about the Alabama deal and how badly Al was wanted, he might

guess that Al had just started running when something went wrong at the *Encanto* and his meeting with his wife. In that case he would probably reason that *he* might as well cash in on it if he could.

Shayne sighed and shrugged and put all those questions out of his mind as he neared 64th. All he could do was to play it by ear, as he had so often played his hunches in the past. One thing in his favor was that Duclos wouldn't be expecting the detective to bring the money. He was looking for a Mr. Jones, and wouldn't be anticipating trouble.

Shayne slowed his car and got over into the right lane and watched the street signs. 64th Terrace was a narrow strip of black-top leading toward the bay with a thick, trimmed hedge of hibiscus on the left bordering a large estate, and with scrub palmettos on the right. There were no street lights east of the boulevard. There was a small house on the corner as Shayne turned into the lane, and his headlights picked out another house two hundred feet ahead on the right. Both were dark and silent.

He drove past them and switched on his bright lights to disclose a guard railing across the top of the bluff where the road ended, with a turning place in front of it for cars. There was no Ford parked there, no car or hu-



man being in sight. He made a circle in front of the railing, stopped his car on the right-hand side against the hedge headed out for a quick get-away if necessary. Then he switched off his motor and lights.

He lit a cigarette and looked at his watch in the match flame and saw it had been exactly forty-seven minutes since he had talked to Duclos on the telephone.

The man was two minutes late.

Shayne unlatched the door on his side, so that it remained closed but swung free. He made himself relax behind the steering wheel and drag deeply on his cigarette.

A lot of things might have delayed Duclos a few minutes. Or he

might be capily parked back on the boulevard watching the intersection to make sure that only one car with one man in it turned in and parked at the dead-end. That would be a sensible precaution for the man to take under the circumstances, even if he didn't anticipate any trouble from Mr. Jones.

Sitting in the front seat with his car facing out, Shayne watched each infrequent car approach the intersection from both north and south, wondering which one would slow down, which one would make the turn in toward him. It might be a long wait.

He finished his cigarette and continued to wait, and no car slowed or turned in. His belly muscles were beginning to tighten as though a giant hand was gripping his guts, and he thought about Duclos having an accident on his way to the rendezvous, of the Ford getting a flat tire and pulling off the road to change it and an ubiquitous police cruiser drawing up behind to politely offer assistance.

Beads of sweat broke out on the redhead's corrugated forehead although the night breeze was cool, and he lit another cigarette and checked his watch again.

He had been waiting nine minutes. Parked here like a sitting duck if a police car were to suddenly turn into the narrow lane in front of him.

He'd finish this last cigarette, he decided. Smoke it down to a short

butt. If Duclos hadn't showed by that time . . .

He heard a rustling in the hibiscus hedge at his right. He turned his head slowly and saw the bulky figure of a man coming through the shrubbery. He drew deeply on his cigarette to make a little pinpoint of light in the night, and waited.

The man stopped six feet from the car and asked cautiously, "Is that Jones?"

It was George Duclos's voice.

Shayne said, "Yeh. How'd you slip up on me like that?"

Damned clever, he thought angrily. Where's the Ford? He's parked it some place and come up on foot. I've got to find that Ford.

He had the brim of his Panama hat pulled low over his face and he sat very still as Duclos circled the car to come up on the right side. The man had seen him only once, at the police station, and fleetingly. Shayne felt he had a good chance to pass unrecognized if he stayed in the car and out of the moonlight.

Duclos chuckled hoarsely as he came up close to the open window. "I wanted to make sure you came alone and weren't going to try any tricks. You got the money?"

Shayne said, "I've got it, but goddamn it, I don't like this. I'd like to know you're alone too. Where's your car parked?"

"What's that to you?" Duclos was unexpectedly belligerent and

Shayne wondered briefly whether he had any particular reason for keeping his car concealed.

He said angrily, "I drove up here open and aboveboard, fair and square. I just don't like you hiding out on me and sneaking up like this. That's all. How do I know you didn't bring along a couple of cops and have got them hidden out too?"

"What in hell would I want with cops? All I want is the cash. Ten grand, huh? Let's see the color of it." He extended his hand eagerly in the moonlight.

"Not so fast. I'm not passing over any money until I know this is on the up and up. Where did you say you left your car?"

"I don't see what that's to do with you."

"I'm asking you, goddamn it," Shayne said savagely. "Maybe you're trying to pull a fast one. Maybe I'll just get the hell on out of here and take the money with me." He leaned forward and reached down for his ignition key.

"Hey. Don't be stupid. What the hell? I parked my car on the next road up and cut across the lawn to get here. That satisfy you?"

"I guess so," Shayne grumbled. "I was supposed to pick something up for the money."

"Sure. I got it right here. It's no good to me as you know damned well." Duclos reached up to his left shirt pocket and felt inside.

Shayne braced himself with his left foot inside the unlatched door and shoved with all his strength. It swung on its hinges and knocked Duclos backward. He lost his footing and went down with flailing arms.

Shayne catapulted through the open door and was on top of him instantly, driving a short, sledgehammer blow to the point of his jaw as he half sat up.

He sank back on the ground without a sound and lay spread-eagled, mouth gaping and running blood from one corner, eyes open and glazed in the bright moonlight.

Shayne knelt beside him and pried open the fingers of the hand that had reached into his shirt pocket.

He extracted a small rectangular of cardboard and rocked back on his heels to examine it with puzzled interest. It appeared to be half of a railroad baggage claim check, torn irregularly across the middle.

Shayne turned it over and over in his hands, frowning at it in complete bewilderment, then thrust it in his pocket and felt Duclos's pulse.

It was irregular but strong, and the man was breathing stertorously.

Shayne got up and got his keys from the ignition, went behind his car and opened the trunk, and then back to Duclos to drag the

unconscious man around and bundled him inside.

He slammed the lid shut, hurried around and got in and started the motor. He turned on his dim lights and drove back to the boulevard, turned north one block and east again, found Duclos's Ford parked beside the road where the man had said it would be. He was glad the street was so deserted.

He drew up behind it and switched off his lights and motor, unlocked his trunk and leaned inside to go through the man's pockets for his car keys.

He was sardonically conscious of holding his breath as he approached the back of the Ford and tried one key in the lock. It didn't go in, but the next one he tried unlocked the trunk.

He hesitated and exhaled a long breath before lifting the lid. This was the pay-off. If the trunk was empty . . .

It wasn't. The old Shayne luck was still riding on his shoulders tonight. The dim moonlight showed the blanket-wrapped body of Al Donlin . . . or Newman . . . exactly as he had placed it there hours before.

The detective leaned in and dragged it out, finding it stiff as a board now with *rigor mortis*, hoisted it awkwardly onto his shoulder and carried it to the rear of his car where he propped it against the fender.

Then he dragged Duclos out

and deposited him on the ground, put the blanketed body inside in his place and finally slammed the lid of the trunk shut.

Thank God, that was done. He had the body back in his own possession, securely locked up. Now, if he didn't have another collision, and encounter a couple more smart cops who didn't have anything better to do than badger innocent motorists . . .

To hell with such unpleasant thoughts!

He straightened up and looked down thoughtfully at the still unconscious Duclos. He'd be coming out of it in a little while. Shayne had only hit him just that one time, after all.

After briefly considering the situation, he stooped and got hold of the unconscious man's ankles, dragged him back to the rear of his own car and shoved him into the trunk where the corpse had been. He slammed it shut and looked down at the Ford keys in his hand, then drew back his arm and threw them as hard as he could over the hedge by the side of the road.

That would take care of George Duclos for a time. Until he decided what he wanted to do with the guy. Right now he didn't know. He just hoped fervently that he would never have to look at his face again.

He got in his car and backed away, made a U-Turn back to the

boulevard, and proceeded southward at a discreet speed toward the city.

XV

APPROACHING THE *Encanto Hotel*, Shayne turned off the boulevard a block to the north, and circled about, so that he could drive directly past the front entrance to the hotel. He drove very slowly, alert for the presence of any police cars in the street or any evidence of unusual activity in the lobby.

He passed Timothy Rourke's car parked at the curb, and saw nothing out of order as he cruised by. The doorman was not even in evidence at this early morning hour, and he made the turn into the alley beside the hotel without being noticed.

He pulled in close to the building and shut off his headlights, stopped in front of the steps leading down to the closed door. He shut off his ignition and sat there for a moment, and the alley was just as silent and deserted as it had been a few hours previously when he had last visited it.

He got out and went down to the door which he had left locked behind him, tried the knob and found it still locked. He bent to study the key-hole while he got a well-loaded key-ring from his pocket, selected one slender key and turned the lock. Shayne opened the door cautiously onto

the square room and found that the overhead light was out and the room empty. Sufficient illumination came from the cage of the service elevator across the room, the doors of which stood invitingly open.

Shayne went up the steps swiftly and unlocked his trunk, got the body out again and carried it down to the cage where he propped it up in one corner. He hurried back to pull the outer door shut, then got into the elevator with the body, released the HOLD button and pressed the one marked 8.

The elevator went up slowly and Shayne's face was grim as he waited for it to stop. It felt uncomfortably crowded in the confines of the small cage. He was beginning to feel a definite aversion toward the presence of the dead man. He was going to be damned glad to get rid of him once and for all.

The cage stopped on the 8th floor and the doors automatically opened. Shayne pushed the HOLD button, looked out cautiously to see that the corridor was empty.

He had the key to Room 810 in his hand as he stepped out and went toward the door. He inserted it soundlessly and turned it with a tiny click, then opened the door. There was no light on in the sitting room of the suite. From the light in the hallway behind him, Shayne could see that the bedroom door directly opposite him was tight-

ly closed, and the sitting room looked, to him, exactly as it had before.

He turned back swiftly without turning on a light inside, retrieved the dead man from the elevator and carried him back to the sitting room.

Inside, he laid the body down on the carpeted floor, and rolled it over three or four times to disengage the hotel blanket. He straightened up, leaving the dead man lying in the middle of the floor on his side, then gathered up the blanket and folded it carefully. He tossed it carelessly over the foot of the sofa, as though someone had laid it there in case their feet got cold.

There had been no sound from the room beyond the closed door.

Shayne went out and closed the door quietly behind him. He long-legged it down the hall to the open elevator, reached inside and released the HOLD button, and stepped back to let the doors slide shut. Then he strolled past 810 and around the corner to the passenger elevators and pressed the DOWN button.

When an empty car stopped, he got in and told the sleepy-eyed operator, "Three, please."

On the third floor he got out and went around the corner again, back to the service elevator shaft. He pushed the button there and waited for the car to come down, felt a vast and flooding sense of

relief when the doors opened to disclose the empty car.

He had now covered his tracks as well as he possibly could, and he turned back as the doors automatically closed behind him.

He was lucky enough to get another operator this time, and the man didn't even glance at him as he stepped in and said briskly, "Lobby, please."

The big lobby was almost empty when he stepped out. Two men stood near the front door talking together, and Shayne felt a little knot of unease form in his stomach when he recognized the hotel detective, John Russco, talking to Timothy Rourke.

Both of them looked over and saw him get out of the elevator, and both watched him curiously and in silence as he approached them.

Russco said heartily, "Mike Shayne, by all that's holy," and held out a big hand to him exactly as though they hadn't seen each other for weeks or months.

Shayne shook hands with him and said, "Hi, John," while Rourke observed the passage between them with a faintly ironic smile.

"Funny to see you here, Mike," Russco said effusively. "Tim was just asking if I'd seen you around tonight. You two aren't cooking something up behind my back, are you?"

"Why, no," Shayne told him

blandly. "Nothing like that. You got nothing to hide from the Press, have you?"

"Of course not," Russco replied too quickly. "Not a damned thing happening around here to-night. Not even a good girlie party I can send you two Casanovas up to."

"Tim and I do have a little business to discuss," Shayne told him pointedly, taking the reporter's arm and drawing him away.

The hotel detective grinned weakly and said, "Yeh . . . well, good luck in working it out," turned his back and sauntered away.

"Two things," Shayne said rapidly when Russco was safely out of earshot. "You stick here, Tim. Use the phone booth and call an anonymous tip into headquarters. Have a radio car investigate a parked Ford on 64th Street between the boulevard and the bay. Registration in the name of George Duclos. And, Tim, tell them to be sure and check into the trunk of the car even if they have to break the lock and force it to get in."

"Good God, Mike," breathed Rourke uneasily. "I thought the last thing in the world you wanted was to have the cops look in that trunk."

"Things are different now," Shayne told him. "Make that call right away . . . and you might even tell them it has some connection with the Alabama bank rob-



bery, just to put them on the right track. Then make another call to headquarters using your own name. Get Homicide and tell them you've got an anonymous tip that something important is due to break at the Encanto Hotel. Get a couple of plainclothes dicks over here and have them wait inconspicuously here in the lobby while you hang around out in the entrance foyer. If I do come back here I don't want to show in the deal at all."

"What the hell kind of brew are you cooking up, Mike?"

"I'm not quite sure. I think I'm going to light a fire and start things boiling over. Before I forget it, Tim. You'd better have this. Make use of it if things break that way."

He thrust his hand in his pocket and pulled out the folded sheets of hotel paper containing the handwritten murder confession signed "Vicky"—and pushed them into Rourke's hand.

The reporter took them with a puzzled frown. "What is it? You're leaving me pretty far out on a limb."

"You can catch up on your reading matter after you make those two telephone calls," Shayne told him. "You know all you need to know . . . and none of this came from me, understand? You haven't seen me since you drove me away from headquarters after I got loose on that stolen car rap."

He squeezed Rourke's shoulder

tightly and hurried out through the front doors and around the hotel to the alley.

His car stood where he had left it. He got in and pulled away fast and drove directly to his hotel, where he parked on the side as before and climbed the stairs to the second floor.

His room was still lighted, and again he unlocked the door and walked in with a reassuring grin for the woman he had left sitting there more than an hour before.

She didn't jump to her feet this time. She sat erect, staring at him with frightened eyes which managed to look hopeful at the same time.

"Is everything all right?" she asked tremulously. "Did you get the money for him? Who was he, Mike? What happened? I've been sitting here wondering and frightened and . . . praying I guess. Thinking about all the things that could go wrong."

"Nothing went wrong," Shayne told her. "He was just a guy on the make. He won't bother you with any more telephone calls."

"Oh God. Is it really over? Can I relax now?"

"Sure. Relax," he told her comfortably. "Maybe you'd like to call Vicky and tell her it's okay. Use the phone if you want to."

"Why should I . . . I'll just waken her. She isn't worried, Mike. I told you she went off to sleep thinking everything was absolute-

ly all right. She doesn't even know I'm gone."

"That's right," he said absently. "Sure. You're right, of course. No need to bother her with a phone call. Better for you to go on back right away and she need never know any of this has happened."

"What *did* happen?" she asked nervously, lacing her fingers together in her lap. "Whatever did he *have*, Mike. Whatever it was he said belonged to Al and that he thought was worth all that money? I've been thinking and racking my brains all the time you were gone. I just can't imagine."

"Oh that," Shayne said casually. "I don't understand that part of it yet. But he seemed to think it was important and so I played along and didn't admit we didn't have the slightest idea what he was talking about."

"Did you get it? What was it?"

"Oh, I got it all right. Maybe it'll mean something to you although I don't see how it can if you've been out of touch with Al all these years."

"What is it? I'm consumed with curiosity."

Shayne shrugged and reached in his pocket and withdrew the torn piece of cardboard he had taken from Duclos's clenched fist. He crossed over to her and held it out, watching her face carefully as she took it and turned it over and over in her hands.

A puzzled frown corrugated her

smooth forehead. "It looks like . . . well, it looks as though it should be familiar. I mean—"

"I think I know what you mean," Shayne agreed quietly. "Isn't it half of a torn claim check for baggage?"

"Of course." Carla looked up at him with bright-eyed expectancy. "But why just half of it, Mike? What good's half to anyone?"

"Nothing that I can see," he responded broodingly. "Unless we had the other half to match up with it. Then we'd have to know where it was checked before you could claim whatever it represents."

Shayne held out his hand for the piece of cardboard, and after a moment's hesitation she dropped it into his palm reluctantly.

He said cheerfully, "I'll hold on to it if you like. Maybe something will come up in the future that will explain what it's all about."

Carla laughed nervously. "After all, it does belong to me, Mike. I paid for it. That is . . . it was my money you used. Don't you think I ought to have it—just for a souvenir at least?"

"Well, sure. It's no good to me. I just thought—" Shayne shrugged his broad shoulders and handed it back to her. "As you say, I certainly haven't any claim on it. I didn't spend any of my money."

"I know most of the cash actually was yours, Mike," she said, instantly contrite although her fin-

gers closed tightly over the card-board. "But it was just a temporary loan. You've got my IOU, you know, if I try to renege on paying it."

Shayne said, "Yeh. I know." His gaunt features expressionless, he stepped back and said, "Wouldn't you like to get back to the hotel now? Your daughter might wake up and find you gone?"

"Oh, yes. I must get back." She stood up, smoothing down her dress and brushing cigarette ashes from the front of it.

Shayne stooped down to pick up her handbag from the floor beside the chair. With his back half-turned to her, he unsnapped it and dropped her room-key inside. Then he held it out, saying: "Don't forget your bag. I'll drive you back."

She accepted it carelessly. "You don't have to do that. I'm sure I can get a taxi."

"I left my car on the street," he told her. "I have to put it in the garage for the night anyhow." He took her elbow and turned her toward the door. "How about an invitation to Vicky's wedding this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes. Mike. Do come by all means. I'll have her call you and give you a formal invitation as soon as she wakes up in the morning."

He said, "That will be nice," and held the door open for her to

get out. He took her arm and led her down the hall past the elevator, explaining, "We can walk down one flight and go out a side door to my car."

He opened the car door for her and helped her in, then went around and got under the wheel beside her, made a U-Turn and started in the direction of the *Encanto Hotel*.

She snuggled against him and sighed. "I'll never be able to thank you properly. But I hope you'll let me try . . . after Vicky's off on her honeymoon, perhaps?"

Shayne said, "I've got a feeling you could make a good try, all right. We'll keep that date open, huh?"

She murmured, "Oh, yes," and then sat up straight beside him suddenly. "Mike! I forgot. What about Al? You said his body was still locked in the trunk of his brother-in-law's car and if it was found there that the police would know you moved it. What about that?"

"I took care of that, too," Shayne told her. "It's not locked in the car any more. It's in a perfectly safe place where the police can't possibly connect me with it."

"Oh, I'm glad. Then you won't get in any trouble for helping me?"

"I'm absolutely in the clear . . . I hope," he told her cheerfully.

He turned into the block in front of the *Encanto Hotel*, and

slowed down in front of the canopied entrance. The doorman still wasn't on duty, but Shayne saw the gangling figure of Timothy Rourke leaning against the wall inside the foyer just beyond the outer doors.

He leaped out to go around and open the door for her, helped her out and opened the hotel door, avoiding looking at Rourke. He said, "You'd better go up alone. No use us being seen here together." Carla smiled gratefully at him and went into the lobby toward the elevators.

Shayne stepped close to the reporter and asked, "Everything all set?"

"Yep. Couple of dicks inside. Was that . . .?"

Shayne said swiftly, "Go on in and the three of you follow her up to number Eight-Ten. Be right behind her when she walks into the room, and you can take it from there."

"What about you, Mike. Where'll you be?"

"In bed," said Shayne emphatically. "This is your show, Tim. I don't know one damned thing about anything that's happened tonight. I'm a bit tired and need a couple of hours sleep."

He went out fast and got in his car, drove to the boulevard and north to the next hotel on the bay-front, where he went in and registered as J. D. Brewster from Sarasota. He got a room-key from the



clerk and went up and piled into bed.

He fell into dreamless sleep almost at once.

XVI

FOR MANY YEARS Mike Shayne had had a standing invitation to have Sunday morning breakfast with his brown-eyed Secretary in her Miami apartment.

On this Sunday morning when he turned up at ten o'clock, Lucy Hamilton seemed surprised to see him, and greeted him with a frown and an anxious question that was almost wifely: "Where have you been all night, Michael? I've been worried, and wondering what on earth had happened."

He yawned and dropped a light kiss on the top of her head. "I've been sleeping. Is that any crime?"

"But where have you been sleeping? Not in your own bed. That's certain."

"Hey now," he protested good-naturedly. "Have you started

checking up on my sleeping habits, Lucy?"

She stepped back from him, biting her underlip. "Chief Will Gentry woke me up from a sound sleep about four o'clock," she informed him coldly, "to ask if I knew where you were. He sounded angry and very disturbed when I assured him I had no idea. He made me promise that if you did contact me I would let him know at once. Then Tim Rourke called again about seven o'clock to ask the same question. He said your hotel reported you had gone out about midnight and hadn't returned, and that all hell was popping. What sort of hell, Michael?"

He shrugged and countered lightly, "How should I know? I was sound asleep and know nothing about such Saturday night goings-on. Is the coffee hot?"

"Of course. Even though I didn't know whether you were in town or not." She turned toward her kitchenette with pursed lips. "With or without?"

"With . . . on the first one, Angel." He yawned mightily again and dropped down on one end of the sofa. He lit a cigarette and sniffed happily when she brought him a mug of strong black coffee heavily laced with cognac.

Her buzzer sounded from the downstairs door of the apartment as she set the coffee royal in front of him, and she murmured, "Who on earth can that be?"

Lucy went to the speaking tube at the door, and in a moment he heard her say, "Of course, Tim. He just showed up and he's sitting here swilling brandy and coffee." She pressed the button that released the catch below, opened her own door wide and came back to tell her employer unnecessarily, "That's Tim. He's coming up."

Shayne said, "I wonder what's bugging him so early this morning," and took a sip of the hot liquid.

Timothy Rourke came in a moment later, looking dishevelled and sleepy, but with an expression on his face like that of a cat that has swallowed the canary. "Where the devil have you been hiding out, Mike?"

"I haven't been exactly hiding out. I just thought I'd get a better night's sleep if I weren't available for questioning. Sit down, Tim. You look as though you could stand a cup of Lucy's excellent coffee."

"My God, can I? With a good slug of bourbon in it, honey?" he appealed to Lucy. "Damn you, Mike. I haven't been to bed yet. I had to cover up all over the place."

Shayne shook his head warningly at him as Lucy came back with another mug of steaming coffee for the reporter.

"Neither Lucy nor I have the faintest idea what all this furor is

about, except Will Gentry woke her up at four o'clock trying to locate me. What for, Tim? What am I supposed to have done?"

Rourke shook his head helplessly, took a sip of hot coffee and sputtered over it. "It's the damndest story. I guess we'll never get it completely straightened out."

"Relax and tell us all about it," Shayne urged him. "You have my curiosity aroused."

Rourke said, "Yeah," and lit a cigarette while he composed his thoughts. "It began about three o'clock this morning when I got a tip there was a dead man in a room at the Encanto Hotel. I called a couple of homicide cops and we went up to room eight-ten. There was a woman having hysterics all over the place and there was a corpse on the floor. Very dead from five small caliber bullets. Stiff as a board. He'd been dead for hours.

"I recognized his ugly face right away from a newspaper picture. Name of Al Newman. Wanted for bank robbery and murder in Alabama a couple of days ago. You know," he said to Shayne, raising his eyebrows. "That Eureka bank job. Shot one of the bank officials in cold blood and got away with forty grand. Only—the woman getaway driver snatched the loot and drove off leaving her two male companions behind."

Shayne said thoughtfully, "I remember reading something about

it. Didn't she drive off with a hostage who was later released? One of the bank tellers?"

"That's right. So here was this Al Newman dead in the woman's hotel room, and her in a tizzy swearing she had no idea how he'd got there and that she'd been out drinking with Mike Shayne all evening, and to get him and ask *him* about it."

"I'll be damned," said Shayne in great surprise. "Who was she?"

"She was registered at the hotel under the name of Mrs. Rose Hughes. Turned out her name is actually Vergie Powers. An actress. Used to do bit parts in Hollywood movies. In fact, she played in some of your shows, Mike. We figured later that's how she knew your name and used it in a pinch."

"Such is fame," marveled Shayne. "You tell Lucy I wasn't out drinking with an actress all evening, Tim. You can vouch for me until at least two o'clock."

"That's right. Well, it appeared later that she was just making up the first wild story that came into her mind. Because she was actually Al Newman's girl-friend. Had been shackled up with him in Alabama while they cased the bank job . . . and she was the driver of the get-away car that snatched the bank loot and left Al to face the consequences behind her. She admitted she thought he had been killed in the chase that followed, and was completely sur-

prised when he turned up in Miami tonight demanding his share of the money."

"So she killed him?"

"She hasn't actually admitted it, but she triggered him, all right. Funny thing. I found a confession in the room on hotel stationary signed Vicky. But it was written in her handwriting. She tried to explain that with another fantastic story about her daughter named Vicky being there and doing the actual shooting, but she couldn't produce any daughter or evidence of one, so that didn't come off."

Shayne said gravely, "You did have yourself quite a time."

"That's not half of it. Another thing I recognized about Al Newman was that he had a married sister in Miami named Duclos."

"Duclos?" Shayne sat up and stared at Rourke as though he couldn't believe his ears. "Not George Duclos," he pleaded. "Not the guy who accused me of stealing his Ford earlier in the night?"

"What on earth, Michael?" demanded Lucy, wide-eyed and excited. "You stole a car?"

"It was all a mistake," he told her. "A comedy of errors. I'll tell you about it later."

"Yeh. That same guy," Tim Rourke told him. "So there was another funny thing. Just before we found the body the police had investigated an anonymous tip and found Duclos locked up in the trunk of his own car out in the

Northeast section. He's been knocked out, and said a couple of strange men had assaulted him and locked him in his own trunk.

"They had him at Headquarters when we brought the Powers woman in, and while neither of them appeared to know each other, when he was questioned about Newman he admitted the fellow had turned up yesterday, told him he was hot and that he had to contact a woman registered at the Encanto as Mrs. Rose Hughes and collect forty grand from her. And he gave Duclos the torn half of a baggage check which he claimed he had got from the bank teller in Eureka who admitted he was in on the robbery with the gang. It seems that he and Vergie had planned all along to ditch the other two in front of the bank and take off with the loot.

"She was frantically denying everything at that point, but a search of her handbag turned up two halves of a railroad baggage claim check at the FEC station. It reclaimed a suitcase that held approximately forty thousand dollars of the bank money . . . and she broke down and admitted everything when confronted with that."

"How had she gotten hold of the second half of the claim check if Newman had left it with Duclos for safekeeping when he went to see her?" asked Lucy.

"That's another part of the whole mixed-up story," admitted



Rourke with a glance at Shayne. "You see, when Duclos first came into the picture—and with Mike's name having been mentioned by

Vergie in the beginning as her drinking companion—the cops remembered that Mike had been picked up driving Duclos's stolen

Ford earlier in the night, and that's when Will Gentry began trying to find Mike to ask him what he knew about all this."

Rourke paused in his recital to draw a long breath and get his thoughts in order.

"As I said, when they found the suitcase with the money in it, Vergie admitted she and the bank teller had driven straight into Montgomery that day and transferred the money into a suitcase. Then she bought a ticket to Miami and they checked the suitcase on her ticket. Neither of them wholly trusting the other they tore the claim check in two and he went back to Eureka to brazen it out, planning to meet her in Miami Saturday night at the Encanto where she would be registered as Mrs. Hughes. They were going to get the money and split it between themselves.

"It was the bank teller, Harvey Giles, whom she was expecting to turn up at her room last night. She didn't know that Al Newman had stayed alive in Alabama, and that he had gotten back to Giles, tortured the poor guy and got his half of the baggage check before killing him.

"So she was totally surprised when Duclos called her up and offered to sell half of the check for ten thousand dollars. She claimed she went to Mike Shayne and propositioned him to accept one thousand in cash and her IOU for the

other nine . . . to meet Duclos and pick up the check.

"Duclos confirmed her story to a certain extent. He admitted phoning her, asking for ten thousand, and arranging to meet a certain Mr. Jones to close the deal. He claimed he did meet Mr. Jones out there where he parked his car. But Jones knocked him unconscious and stole half of the claim check, then locked him up in the trunk of his own car."

Rourke paused and shrugged his shoulders cynically. "By that time, no one knew exactly what was what. Mike wasn't available to answer any questions. And, actually, it didn't seem to matter a hell of a lot.

"We had a dead bank robber who had murdered twice. And we had his woman accomplice who'd burned him. And Duclos, who'll draw a prison term as accessory after the fact. Under the circumstances . . ."

Rourke turned in his chair and addressed Shayne directly, "I think Will Gentry is inclined to doubt whether you had anything to do with the deal at all. There's no positive evidence to tie you into any of it. Unless you want to come in voluntarily and explain what in hell you *were* doing last night."

Mike Shayne shook his head calmly at the question in Rourke's voice. "It seems to me you and the cops did a good job without any

assist from me at all. Let's leave it that way."

"Michael Shayne!" said Lucy Hamilton fiercely. "You're the world's most irritating man. 'What *were* you doing all last night? Stealing cars and all.'"

Shayne grinned at her and held out his empty coffee mug. "How about a straight shot of coffee this time. And then how about whipping up some scrambled eggs . . . with maybe some sausage poached in wine to start, and then fried that lovely golden brown the way you do them? Sound good to you, Tim?"

"Wonderful. About three eggs for me, Lucy."

"All right, you two." She got up with an air of offended dignity which did not fool either of them. She took Shayne's empty mug and headed for the kitchen with her firm chin uptilted. "Keep your secrets and see if I care."

While she was refilling Shayne's mug, Rourke asked him suddenly, "When did you first catch on, Mike?"

"When I saw her IOU and recognized the handwriting as the same as the note she'd given me signed Vicky. That started all of the other wheels clicking."

Lucy Hamilton came back with another mug of coffee for him, and he caught her hand and detained her as she set it down.

"How'd you like to go to a wedding, Lucy?"

"What on earth are you talking about now?"

"A big social affair on the Beach this afternoon. Maybe you read about it in the society section a couple of days ago. A girl named Vicky Andrews who is marrying a state senator. Her mother is a Hollywood script writer."

"What *are* you getting at, Michael? It happens I did read about it. But how on earth do you think we can get an invitation?"

"Want to bet?" he asked her confidently.

"No. Not when I see that gleam in your eye."

"Call the Encanto Hotel," he suggested, "and ask for Miss Andrews. I'll take it from there."

She hesitated, not knowing whether to take him seriously or not, and then released her hand from his and went to the telephone stand where she looked up the telephone number. Timothy Rourke sat there finishing his drink and looking mystified while Lucy dialled the hotel number and said crisply, "Miss Andrews, please."

She turned and held the receiver out to Shayne, "They're ringing her."

He went across the room and took it from her. He heard a young girl's voice say, "Hello? Yes?"

"Is that Vicky?" the redhead asked.

"Yes it is," she caroled. "Who is this?"

"Could I speak to your mother, Vicky?"

"Sure. Hey, Mom! It's for you." Shayne waited until an older, more resonant voice came over the wire: "Yes?"

"Is that Carla Andrews?"

"Why . . . yes." The voice sounded doubtful. "Who is this?"

"I'm Michael Shayne, Miss Andrews. Brett Halliday has told me that you—"

"Michael *Shayne*?" The voice was charged with surprise and happy recognition. "My Gawd! Now my visit to Miami is complete. When I was flying in yesterday, I *thought* about trying to call you. I'm so happy you did."

Shayne said, "I want to ask you one question, Miss Andrews. This may come as a surprise, but think about it for a moment. Do you know—have you ever known—an actress named Vergie Powers?"

Evidently Carla Andrews didn't have to think very long. "Vergie? Sure. I haven't heard from her for years. But she played some bit

parts in a few of your television shows while I was writing some of the scripts. What's with Vergie? She was a pretty good actress."

"She's one hell of an actress still," Shayne told her. "It's a long story, Carla, which I think you'll enjoy hearing. In the meantime—how difficult is it to get invited to Vicky's wedding this afternoon?"

"Michael . . . Shayne?" Carla's voice was laughingly affectionate. "We'd be honored. Vicky will be delighted. Do you mean to say you really want to come?"

"My secretary would love to."

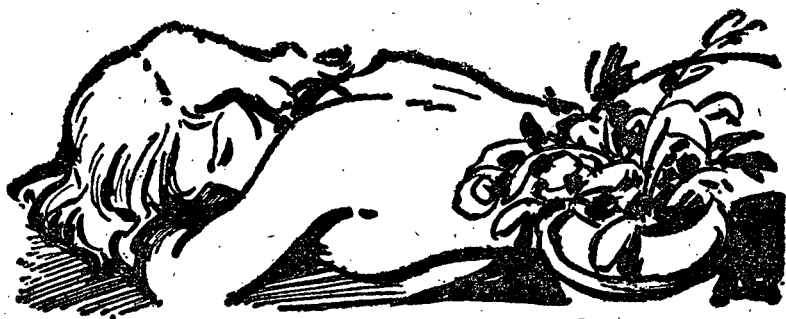
"How absolutely wonderful, Mikel! Lucy Hamilton! My Gawd! The lines of asinine dialogue I've put into her mouth.—Of course, you must both come. I'll apologize to both of you for those lousy scripts the producer made me write."

Laughing, Shayne told her, "We'll be there, Carla. Until this afternoon."

He hung up and turned to tell Lucy, "I hope to God you've got something appropriate to wear to a very fancy wedding."



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BEHOLDEN

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THE WORLD WILL call me a monster. It will say, among other things, that I repaid the selfless heroism of the man who saved my life by murdering him, and that I did so for the most abysmally adolescent of reasons.

The world will be mistaken. I am neither an insensate brute nor an intellectual cripple. I do not resort to idiot violence for motives of the kind which will be ascribed to me. And since my time is short—I

have on the table beside this typewriter the gun with which I will soon insure its brevity—I would very much like to set the record straight.

I killed Stacy Crawford because, to state the matter baldly, it was either his life or mine. Only his death could free me of the relationship that began in that nightmare hour on Hill 404 in Korea, now so many thousand miles and so many years ago.

© 1963, by Jonathan Craig

One of the minor ironies is that it was I myself who wrote the citation which brought Stacy the Congressional Medal of Honor. And on that cold, icy, jewel-bright day in December of 1952, it was I—next, of course, after the President—who was the first to salute him. That salute, I realized in bitter retrospect, was a symbol of an involvement that was to grow into the intolerable soul-slavery that could end only in his death.

There is no question but that Stacy's heroism that night, when he single-handedly silenced two pill-boxes, merited our nation's highest military honor. Neither is there any question but that his second feat on that same night—that of rescuing me from the enemy soldiers who, within minutes, would have completed the slow torture which they had chosen as the means of my execution—was something no one else at that time and in that place could—or would—have done.

I was, of course, immeasurably grateful and beholden to him. After our discharge from the Army, I secured him a position with my firm on a level very nearly my own, and I saw to it that my wife's and my friends became his as well. Almost at once, it seemed, he became as well-liked and as much esteemed by both friends and business associates as he had been by the men in our company on Korea.

And then, almost a year after that ceremony at the White House,

there came the first dawning of what our relationship had become. In some inexplicable way Stacy, by saving my life, had obtained title to it. My soul was no longer my own; it was his.

In other times, among certain peoples, the man whose life was saved by another belonged to him—literally, as a purchased slave belonged to a master. My own enslavement was only some subtle chemistry of the psyche; and yet, just as is the case with certain grave physical maladies, to become aware of its existence was at the same time to realize the inevitability of its outcome.

I first became conscious of it in the casual, perhaps unthinking comments of friends and neighbors. Whatever the phrasing, the meaning was always: There, but for the grace of Stacy Crawford, walks a dead man.

How little does it take to transmute gratitude into hate? *That* little. The continual reminders that because my life had been saved by Stacy it somehow belonged to him, that after all, if not for Stacy I would *have* no life—these bored into my mind with the relentless, pounding stab of a pneumatic drill. Logic and emotional maturity became mere words, mockeries, meaningless combinations of letters found on this or that page of a dictionary.

And then came the day when my employer, embarrassed and apolo-

getic, told me that Stacy, not I, would receive the advancement which I, with every right and justification, had long taken for granted.

"I know you'll accept this in the proper spirit," he had said. "After all, if it hadn't been for Stacy Crawford . . ."

He had broken off with a shrug, but he had meant that, if it hadn't been for Stacy, I wouldn't even be around to resent what had happened.

And of course there were the children—Joyce, four, and Warren, six—and their voices clear and child-sharp through the open bedroom window as they discussed me with monumental solemnity. Stacy Crawford was a nice man, they agreed.

After all, if it hadn't been for Stacy, they would *have* no father. They conveyed the impression, and conveyed it clearly, that their father had been a *gift* from Stacy. Consider: these thoughts, these words, in the minds and mouths of children. My children.

I could easily cite a thousand other instances in the decades between that first awareness of the real nature of Stacy's and my relationship and the final, apparently trivial incident that decided me to murder him. Then, too, there were such further reminders as those four magazine pieces, coming at intervals of three or four years, recounting yet again the events on

Hill 404, each with at least two photographs, Stacy's and mine. And the television show in 1954, the motion picture in 1957, and the frequent references in the local newspapers.

But there is no need for further explanation or documentation. The point is this: After two decades of knowing that others thought of me as the possession of another man, I had at last reached the stage where I knew that one more incident, one more word, even one more meaningful look, would deprive me of the last vestige of sanity. Just as with the victim of Chinese water torture, when there is one final drop in all the thousands before insanity, and the next drop to fall strikes the forehead of a madman, so it was with me.

To regain possession of my life, I had no choice but to take Stacy Crawford's; and that is what I did. I killed him in the doorway of his home with the tiny Remington .41 caliber double derringer which he had himself restored to perfect condition and presented to me as a Christmas gift seven years before. I fired the upper barrel of the gun into his chest from a distance of less than two feet, pushed the gun into my belt, buttoned my jacket over it, and walked home.

I had been seen by no one, would be suspected by no one. In the two short blocks to my house I dropped the weight of two decades from my shoulders. I was my

own man again. My life, my soul, my *self*, were my own. I was beholden to no one. And, for the first time in twenty years, I knew the meaning of euphoria.

I am by temperament the most undemonstrative of men. And yet, when I reached my house and saw my children—*my* children, not mine by the grace of Stacy Crawford—I felt such an excess of elation that I could scarcely contain myself, and Joyce and Warren, after their initial mild alarm at my unheard-of clownings, were soon caught up in them.

Their mother, they said, had gone next door for a moment. I walked out to the bedroom, opened the drawer of the night table to get a fresh package of cigarettes—and saw on the floor, hidden from any except the exact spot at which I stood, the miniature silver dueling pistol which Stacy Crawford, a firearm enthusiast, had carried as a pocketpiece.

In my wife's and my bedroom, the presence of such an item could have but one meaning, and I must

have stood there staring at it for fully half a minute.

I was just stooping to pick it up when my wife spoke to me from the doorway.

I walked toward her, extended my closed hand, and then opened my fingers to reveal the pocket-piece. I said nothing.

My wife, on the other hand, said many things—none of them original, none of them convincing. Then, after a long silence, when at last she realized that further denial and dissimulation would be futile, she spoke the words which consigned her to the same fate that had befallen Stacy Crawford.

"But, darling," she said, "aren't you forgetting something? After all, if it hadn't been for Stacy Crawford, you wouldn't be here to *care* whether I'd been unfaithful or not."

It was then that I emptied the lower barrel of the derringer into her body, just as I had emptied the upper barrel into Stacy Crawford's.



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